

4-2020

Planting in Difficult Soil: Equipping Planters and Spouses for Church Planting in the Pacific Northwest

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Doctoral Project Approval Sheet

This doctoral project entitled

PLANTING IN DIFFICULT SOIL: EQUIPPING PLANTERS AND SPOUSES FOR
CHURCH PLANTING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Dr. Tim Morey



Dr. Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: April 21, 2020

PLANTING IN DIFFICULT SOIL: EQUIPPING PLANTERS AND SPOUSES FOR
CHURCH PLANTING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
REV. GREG JOINES
APRIL 2020

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ABSTRACT

Planting in Difficult Soil: Equipping Planters and their Spouses for Church Planting in the Pacific Northwest

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2020

This paper presents the cultural, theological, and practical background for a church planting manual. By examining the ideological, geographical, and cultural challenges of church planting in the Pacific Northwest, this project presents a culturally sensitive, yet innovative, approach. While church planting in a post-Christian climate is not new, there are unique challenges and opportunities for church planting in this region, especially for conservative denominations. After describing the culture and context of the Pacific Northwest, it surveys the most helpful works that have emerged in the past twenty years. Most of the books are geared towards church planting, however, one book is a theological analysis of Leslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology. This theological analysis provides the synthesis that informs the ontology and economy of a viable, missional, and sustainable ecclesiology in this secular age.

Building off practical and theological assessments, the next section examines three different theological traditions; Reformed, Anabaptist, and Celtic. While the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions are a product of modernist, enlightenment epistemology, they both offer constructive theological convictions, ecclesiological practices, and unique postures of engaging culture. These contributions have helped the church over the past half millennia. While these traditions are often seen in juxtaposition with each other, the older Celtic Church side-stepped these problems by embodying the strengths of both traditions in an attempt to evangelize and reach a culture much like the Northwest. After positing the Celtic tradition as a preferable model to consider when planting in the Pacific Northwest (and thereby incorporating the strengths of both the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions), the focus turns to the practical aspects of the manual. After presenting the vision, the mission, and the context of the manual, the final section describes implementing and evaluating the manual. The first appendix provides the training manual.

Content Reader: Dr. Tim Morey

Word Count: 293 words

To my wife, Dolly.

There is no one else I'd rather journey with.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty and administration at Fuller Theological Seminary who have encouraged me throughout this process, especially Kurt Fredrickson and Cindy Lee. Dr. Tim Morey has been a wonderful content reader and I am thankful for his insights. Pat Roach encouraged me to cultivate a culturally-sensitive and contextual philosophy of ministry that gave rise to this project. Thanks to the Northwest Church Planting Network and leadership of Mike Kelly for believing in me. The officers of Christ Central (Andrew Sweeny, Shawn Schumacher, JJ and Janine Arthur, and Bjorn and Jenny Bulthuis) have been supportive throughout this entire process and I am thankful to minister alongside them. Finally, this project is only possible because of the amazing love of and support of my family.

Dolly, no amount of words could accurately convey my love and gratitude for you.

Josie, Belle, and Greyson, you have taught me so much about love, I hope I can reciprocate it back to you.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

When Lewis and Clark first set out to discover of the Pacific Northwest, they knew how they would arrive. After some time traversing the plains, they presumed they would encounter a riverway, like the Missouri or Mississippi, and gently coast to the Pacific Oceans in canoes. However, their plan was greatly challenged when they crossed the plains. Instead of a water route, they beheld the Rocky Mountains. For their mission to be successful, they had to adapt contextually and creatively.¹

In a similar way, the church of the twentieth century knew the culture and the methodology to reach their neighbor and plant churches. After a successful millennia of church growth movements, world missions, and denominational expansion, the church knew how to reach the twenty-first century. However, this new cultural context presented an uncharted, and unexpected, landscape. Within this new, secular age, the previous methodology and plan proved inadequate. The challenges of globalism, post-modernism, and pluralism proved that the tools of the modernist church were as effective as canoes for mountaineering.

The Pacific Northwest is still in need of discoverers and pioneers, like Lewis and Clark. The religious and spiritual landscape of the Pacific Northwest is prime for a rediscovery, which creates a unique opportunity for the global church. Like many areas, the cultural, sociological, and religious trends of the Northwest reflect the broader socio-

¹ This analogy is adapted from Tod E. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2018). Kindle Loc. 335.

cultural trends of the country in future decades. By investing in creative and contextual ministry in the Northwest, the church can provide more tools and resources for the next missionary age of the church.

For the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), this is an important issue. Being a denomination that is largely based and shaped in the South and Southern culture, the methodology is recognized as being unsuccessful in progressive contexts such as the Northwest and Northeast. However, there is also the realization that more of the South increasingly reflects the values and challenges of the Northwest. If the PCA is unable to reach the Northwest and Northeast, she will eventually lose the South. The current methodology needs to be challenged. The rate of successful church plants in Oregon is roughly sixty percent, and this statistic reflects the success of other denominations. Currently, there are only eight active PCA churches in Oregon.

In an attempt to equip a new wave of ecclesiological and missional pioneers (minsters, planters, and creative laity), this doctoral project presents a creative and contextual proposal for planting in the Northwest. This proposal reimagines the theological and pragmatic foundations of church planting by expanding the theological visions of the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions and finding a synthesis within the Celtic tradition. This provides planters and ministers with additional resources and tools to approach the mountains of post-modern, post-Christian, secularism with creativity and not rely on the antiquated tools from modernity.

The first part of the paper surveys the current landscape; both geographically and ecclesologically, in order to understand planting in this context. The first chapter presents the complicated history and cultural narrative of the Northwest. Although it has

all the characteristics of a post-Christian region, its history and cultural development demonstrate the region is more pre-Christian. By showing the historical and cultural background of the Northwest, this paper articulates how this region is made up of two smaller regions (the Left Coast and Far West). Despite the existence of two different regions of the Northwest, varied expressions of Christianity have struggled to reach both regions.

The second chapter surveys pertinent literature to establish the theological and practical basis for planting effectively in the Northwest. The first category of literature focuses on cultural-theological resources. The second category surveys pragmatic-theological resources. Many of these resources overlap in theology, emphasis, and practice. While some emphasize a strong theological basis, others are more theoretical. The manual incorporates these resources, thereby providing more tools for planters. The overlap of these books establishes a robust theological and practical paradigm for planting sustainable churches in the Northwest.

Part Two of this project begins with a theological reflection. Chapter 3 presents a theological reflection by considering three different Christian traditions: Reformed, Anabaptist, and Celtic. Each tradition makes unique and significant contributions to the broader church in both their witness and practice. Rather than broadly considering these traditions, this paper studies distinct contributions within each tradition and how these contributions can provide a theological foundation for planting in the Northwest. The Reformed church emphasizes a biblical theology that culminates in the unfolding story of God that climaxes in the gospel. This theological presupposition can become theoretical or abstract; whereas the Anabaptist tradition embodies the gospel within thoughtful

expression of presence, forming meaningful community aimed at creating a counter culture. In contradistinction to both theological traditions, the early Celtic Church is an alternative ecclesiological model that embodied the strengths of both traditions. The Celtic tradition provides a rediscovered paradigm for a missional ecclesiology in the Pacific Northwest.

The fourth chapter provides the mission and vision of the training manual. Rather than being an esoteric or abstract exercise, this manual will be employed in churches for church planting in the Northwest. This chapter describes the mission (desired outcome), vision (how to achieve that outcome), and context (where its employed) making the manual applicable, helpful, and useful in its context.

Chapter 5 describes the implementation of the manual to various Northwest churches. This includes partnering with local congregations, denominational networks, and seminaries to recruit planters, as well as raising planters organically within churches. It also includes a component for core groups that wish to call a planter as well. After detailing the deployment of the manual, it provides metrics to assess planters and church plants, as well as encouraging planters for long-term sustainable ministry. The appendixes provide a sample of the training manual and assessment tools.

CHAPTER 1:

COMPLICATED CONTEXT OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

While being one of the youngest regions of our country, the Pacific Northwest has incredible beauty, diversity, and opportunity. The beautiful landscapes are unique and varied. Washington state is comprised of nine ecoregions, whereas Oregon has seven, both states have many more sub-ecosystems. The region treasures its ecology and values ecological preservation. Yet, the Northwest's passion for its ecology does not inhibit technology, or innovation, but rather fuels it. Known for technological entities such as Boeing, Amazon, and Microsoft, the Northwest has become a global center of commerce, technology, and cultural influence. The Northwest contributes to global culture by influencing trends in coffee, technology, and music. However, despite its geography or cultural contributions, the region itself exemplifies an ecclesiological opportunity. The region exhibits the new secular age of missions demonstrated by the spiritual demographics common of Western Europe and the Northeast. To effectively plant new congregations in this region, the church needs to understand this area.

Northwest Nations

While it is universally acknowledged that the Northwest is secular and post-Christian, it is more complicated than it first appears. Within the Northwest, smaller cities (e.g. Corvallis, OR) reflect the secular urban ideologies of urban cities (e.g. Portland and Seattle), while some larger cities (e.g. Spokane, WA) reflect rural ideologies. This is usually interpreted as an “urban” and “rural” distinction. This distinction would be an oversimplification. This division is not just of ideological, cultural, or geographical identities, but something greater. The Northwest region is comprised of two distinct geographies, or nations.

Colin Woodard, in his book *American Nations*,² shows that these differences are not merely reflection of population density, urbanization, or globalization, but rather a reflection of the eleven different “nations” that comprise of America.³ Woodard says each region contains a nation with its own values, culture, and affinity that transcends state boundaries. He differentiates this idea of “nation” in juxtaposition with the idea of a “state” noting,

A state is a sovereign political entity like the United Kingdom, Kenya, Panama, or New Zealand, eligible for membership in the United Nations and inclusion on the maps produced by Rand McNally or the National Geographic Society. *A nation* is a group of people who share- or believe they share- a common culture, ethnic origin, language, historical experience, artifacts and symbols.⁴

² Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (New York: Viking, 2011).

³ Woodard notes that America is comprised of eleven different “Nations”; Yankeedom, New Netherland, the Midlands, Tidewater, Greater Appalachia, The Deep South, New France, El Norte, First Nation, the Left Coast, and Far West. Woodard, *American Nations*, 5-7.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

Woodard argues that the Pacific Northwest is made up of two nations: the Left Coast and the Far West. Each has a unique origin, culture, and expression that demonstrates differing values despite close geographic proximity. Therefore, a smaller town in the Left Coast reflects progressive values and ideals, whereas some larger towns in the Far West reflect the rural ideals. Yet, each nation provides its own cultural distinctions and opportunities for contextual church planting.

The Left Coast

After the initial discovery of the region by Lewis and Clark, the Northwest was settled in a way that has forever shaped its cultural milieu. The Left Coast is the region between the “Pacific Ocean and the Cascade and Coast mountain ranges ... it stretches from Monterey, California to Juneau, Alaska including four decidedly progressive metropolises: San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver.”⁵ This region was established by two groups: New Englanders (comprised of merchants, missionaries, and woodsmen) and Greater Appalachians (consisting of farmers, prospectors, and fur traders). These two groups have shaped the ideologies of the Left Coast by combining the “Yankee faith in good government and social reform with a commitment to individual self-exploration and discovery.”⁶ This is reflected in the innovative, informational technologies and commitment to social and environmental reforms, and progressive values and politics. This attitude of the Far West is exemplified in the urban centers of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

the Northwest (e.g. Seattle, Portland, Vancouver) and in smaller towns within the Left Coast.

The Far West

Whereas the Left Coast is mostly shaped by those who settled it, the culture of the Far West is influenced more by its geography and climate. Woodard notes,

Environmental factors truly trumped ethnic ones. High, dry, and remote, the interior west presented conditions so severe that they effectively destroyed those who tried to apply the farming and lifestyle techniques used in Greater Appalachia, the Midlands, or other nations. With minor exceptions this vast region couldn't be effectively colonized without the deployment of vast industrial resources: railroads, heavy mining equipment, ore smelters, dams, and irrigation systems.⁷

To achieve this colonization, the Far West became dependent upon larger corporations (usually based in east coast cities) or the federal government to manipulate and pioneer its environment to allow more opportunities. This creates a paradoxical context in which the Far West is dependent upon external forces, while remaining frustrated at external involvement of distant entities.

Since the Northwest (Washington and Oregon) is comprised of the Left Coast *and* Far West, each nation is inherently at odds with each other. Whereas the Left Coast favors ecological preservation and conservatism, the Far West is dependent upon ecological engagement and manipulation for its livelihood. The Left Coast seeks the individualism and self-expression, while the Far West maintains relationships with larger

⁷ Ibid.

entities, corporations, and government. Each nation has different cultures, values, and economic dependencies. However, there is the same basic opportunity in both nations.

Secularism in the Northwest

Despite the vast differences of values, culture, and affinity, there are similarities. Both nations are inherently secular. Following the national trends, the Northwest is one of the least religious areas of the country, and this truth is reflected in both nations. Both the Far West and the Left Coast exhibit the characteristics of post-Christendom, but in different expressions: it is a secularism that encompasses both urban and rural, left-leaning and right-leaning. The secularism found in the Northwest that exceeds the common understanding of what is secular. In this way, the nations of the Pacific Northwest are two expressions of the same challenges of our secular age.

Charles Taylor's seminal work, *A Secular Age*, describes the emergence and values of secularism. The characteristics of secularism include the "Age of Authenticity"⁸ mostly manifested in being "spiritual, but not religious." The idea behind this age is understanding "that each one of us has his/ her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside."⁹ This has led to various expressions and endeavors to discover or create authenticity, whether through ecological preservation,

⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 486.

⁹ Ibid.

foodie movements, hipster culture, technological development, rural farming, politics, or spirituality.¹⁰ Both nations within the Northwest create meaning.

The Left Coast creates authenticity (meaning) through spirituality. Taylor explains this context as “living in a spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane.”¹¹ This spiritual pluralism becomes a cornucopia of spiritual options, so within the *Age of Authenticity*, “The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this”¹² This devolves into the common self-designation of being “Spiritual, but not Religious,” which has continued to increase over the past two decades.¹³

In contrast to the secular left of the Left Coast, there is a secularism of the Far West, expressed in a different manner. This secularism reflects the values and cultures of the Far West. This is demonstrated in the nationalism, embracing relativism for right-leaning purposes, and, like the Left Coast, low religious commitments.¹⁴ Glenn Damon notes, “The adherence to a Judeo-Christian ethic often conceals the spiritual and social crisis confronting rural people. While upholding traditional values, they replace biblical

¹⁰ The comedy, *Portlandia*, functions as a wonderful satire to the idiosyncratic tendencies of life within the Northwest.

¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 300.

¹² Ibid., 486.

¹³ Cf. Christopher James, *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 31ff.

¹⁴ Cf. Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 15ff.

faith with self-reliance.”¹⁵ This is most clearly demonstrated with the political agenda of rural communities, posture of voting, and various demonstrations that are inherently hostile to the values of the Left Coast or progressive ideals.

Christian Engagement in the Northwest

To engage the challenges of secularism, the church adopted two primary postures towards the broader culture in the twentieth century. Both postures are reflective of the way the churches have traditionally responded to broader culture. James Hunter, in *To Change the World*,¹⁶ describes several approaches characterizing the church’s engagement with culture in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the church has repeated these models in the twenty-first century.

The first approach is done by the Left, where the church embraces the progressive narrative of culture and assimilates within it. This was predominately the tactic of mainline Protestantism by denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist, and Episcopal Church. The second approach is characterized by churches on the Right, where rather than assimilating into culture, it seeks withdrawal or a fortress mentality. Both approaches had unintended consequences for the church, and the effects of both approaches haunt the ecclesiological landscape. Namely, the church has lost its

¹⁵ Glenn Daman and Brian Wechsler, *The Forgotten Church: Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 37.

¹⁶ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

presence and become an ineffectual and irrelevant institution reflecting the problems of earlier generations.

Both the Left Coast and Far West were able to “demythologize” Christianity and religion with the same tactics. James Smith notes that secularism was able to side-step Christianity, not by disproving it, but by offering a more compelling story.¹⁷ For the Left Coast and Far West, the controlling narratives of their respective nations made Christianity superfluous. To meet this challenge of secularism, the church in the Northwest traditionally responded to both nations by trying to offer logical, and rational, arguments and apologetics, which proved ineffective for evangelism, discipleship, or church planting. In the wake of ineffectual labors to an uninterested audience, Christianity has dwindled in the Pacific Northwest. The story of Christianity in the Northwest serves as a warning for the global church.

However, the Northwest is not beyond hope or opportunity. Like the first pioneers to the region who sacrificially gave of themselves to create possibilities for those after them, the next wave of planters can pioneer in a way to create new opportunities in this region.

¹⁷ James K. A Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 23ff.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the various resources that seek to address church planting in post-Christendom. Many of these works have recognized the difficulty and the opportunity of Church planting in a secular context and provide an insight into engaging this cultural moment. These resources can be gathered into two distinct categories: cultural-theological resources and pragmatic-theological resources. These works are inherently theological with much overlap, but they present a polyphonic voice that can help nuance a distinct understanding of planting in a Post-Christian context.

The first category of literature focuses on cultural-theological resources, such as *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* by Stefan Paas,¹ *City Shaped Churches: Planting Churches in a Global Era* by Linda Bergquist and Michael D. Crane,² and *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary*

¹ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016).

² Linda Bergquist and Michael Crane, *City Shaped Churches: Planting Churches in a Global Era* (Skyforest: Urban Loft Publishers, 2018).

Ecclesiology by Michael Goheen.³ Each one of these books emphasizes the cultural challenges of secularism, the need for planting, but the authors also understand the priority of needing a rich, theological tradition. The second category surveys pragmatic-theological resources, such as the *Redeemer Church Planting Manual* by Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church⁴ and *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice* by Christopher James.⁵

Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience

by Stefan Paas

Stefen Paas' *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* may be the demythologizing book of the church planting world. The book is unique in its scope, depth, and conclusions. Paas begins by challenging the idea of church planting biblically by noting three characteristics in the New Testament;

- 1) In the New Testament a Christian community, or a church, is never the object of “planting” or “sowing.” “Church” (or any other word) can only be the object of “planting” when a more or less solid conception of what the word “church” represents has established itself. In the earliest period of Christianity such a doctrine of church is still lacking, although many foundational elements and intuitions are already in place.
- 2) In the New Testament a church, or a Christian community, can be designated as the result of a process of gospel planting, and thus it can be called a field or a vineyard. This is one root out of which church planting language grows. The other root is the development of ecclesiology, leading to a doctrine of the universal Christian church. As soon as this view had emerged, it became

³ Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Redeemer Church Planting Manual* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2002).

⁵ James, *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice*.

possible to talk about the church as a transcultural phenomenon and an identifiable object of planting activity.

- 3) It must be noted that this early view of church planting refers first and foremost to the universal Catholic Church, and only secondarily to local churches. Early church planting language developed out of a concern to stress the divine character of the church and its essential unity through all local varieties. This does not necessarily contradict local flexibility and adaptation, but it shows how planting language has always assumed that the church is a transcultural phenomenon to begin with.⁶

After considering the biblical foundations of planting and presenting church planting as the result of “gospel planting,” Paas describes the foundational ideas and methodology of planting, historically, in Europe. Church planting generally followed a three-stage approach, “proclamation, gathering, and planting.”⁷ This classic model of church planting was utilized in both Catholic and Protestant churches. This was a holistic attempt in which the planting of the church was the result. He notes,

The classic model considers the planting of the church as the conclusion of a three-stage process of evangelism (conversion), gathering (baptism and community formation), and planting (constitution). It appears that especially the second stage could stretch out for a long time, depending on the degree of Christianization or civilization of the target population.⁸

Following the Medieval and Reformation church, the modern evangelical movement saw church planting through the lens of multiplications of congregations, rather than as an extension of the catholic church. As a result, the presupposition was on emphasis on

⁶ Ibid., 14-15.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Ibid., 31.

evangelism and soul salvation. Paas notes the problem with this emphasis is that it collapses the three stages into a single movement of “evangelism-as-planting” model.⁹

In the wake of the modern, evangelical church planting movement, there are currently three primary motivators for planting new churches in secular, post-Christian Europe. These motivators are “Confessional purity, growth, or innovation.”

¹⁰ Confessional purity views “planting is necessary in order to plant purer churches than the existing ones.”¹¹ Growth views the planting of “new churches will lead to numerical growth of the whole church. It is basically a methodology of evangelism.”¹² Finally, innovation views planting as a “reflection on church and mission, and will therefore lead to necessary innovations of the church in post-Christian societies. This motive is rooted in disappointing experiences with modern evangelical church planting practices in secularized Europe.”¹³

In many ways, these three motivators have been the predominant reasons and expressions of church planting in Europe. Each one of these motivators have contributions and liabilities. Another challenge in the wake of globalism, secularism, and pluralism is the emergence of “Religious Market Theory” (RMT). Paas notes,

By definition a market is a place of competition. If there is only one provider, there is no market but a monopoly. A market has more than one supplier, and this means that the buyer has a choice... RMT is located therefore in the context of

⁹ Cf. Ibid., 42.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

religious plurality. This feature seems to fit in nicely with the current situation in Western Europe, where state churches and people churches (Volkskirchen) have all but lost their hold on society, and where many new religious groups and non-Western religions have settled down.¹⁴

The RMT theory has challenged both the ideas of church planting and renewal because it's no longer merely Christians "fighting for corners of the market." Rather, every global religion has an opportunity within this new market. Within this context, the motivators for church planting have yielded interesting results. Chiefly, although the three motivators are legitimate, they may, unintentionally, become ineffective in reaching their goal. For example, Paas challenges one of the most common mantras within the church planting world, namely, "planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven."¹⁵ Paas, through his extensive research shows this is not the case. Paas notes, "Historically, it is much more likely that church planting *is a response to population growth or conversions*, rather than the other way around."¹⁶ Furthermore, Paas notes, "It seems, therefore, that church planting is a good strategy (but perhaps not the only one) to release missionary leadership, in the right location, and at the right time. Also, it may be an important way for denominations to remain in touch with demographic shifts."¹⁷ In many ways, *Church Planting in the Secular West* is a needed correction and challenge to the bulk of the modern church planting literature within the

¹⁴ Ibid., 127-128.

¹⁵ This quote is from C. Peter Wagner, religious sociologist, this is the presupposition of the second motivator.

¹⁶ Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*., 178. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ Ibid., 179.

United States. Paas challenges and counteracts the common, assumed narrative within many church planting movements. He demonstrates, demographically, sociologically, and biblically, that church planting is not necessarily the “silver bullet” to meeting the challenges of post-Christendom, or secularism. His careful analysis although refreshingly critical, shows that church planting is not the ecclesiological *necessary* work of our age, nor more important, this can expand our understanding and possibilities for engaging our context.

**City Shaped Churches: Planting Churches in a Global Era by Linda Bergquist
and Michael D Crane**

The strength of *City Shaped Churches*, is that it is a joint venture into reflecting in the characteristics, demographics, and sociological make-up of global cities to see the kingdom opportunities. Because of global mobility, immigration, and diversity, communities in the Northwest have a new opportunity to minister to diverse demographics, rather than reflecting the homogeneity of previous generations. In this way, smaller towns are microcosms of cities. Bergquist and Crane provide an extensive, theologically reflective work that seeks to understand, biblically and practically, the uniqueness of cities.

They begin by noting, “Throughout biblical history, the city stands out as both an aggregator of evil as well as a point of hope.”¹⁸ They conduct an impressive biblical theological study regarding the ways that cities have been both good and evil. They draw

¹⁸ Bergquist and Crane, *City Shaped Churches*, Kindle Loc. 500.

attention to Jesus' ministry in relation to the city. They state, "Jesus' march to his cross and resurrection is a march to Jerusalem, the city (Conn & Ortiz, 2001, p. 126). Conn (1985) believes the city plays a central role in Luke's theology and is a key to understanding a biblical theology of urban mission (p. 410)."¹⁹

Most impressive in their study is the personal connection that is assumed to cities. One of the PCA's greatest challenge for planting churches in the Pacific Northwest is that most of the planters come from the south, and are unable to adapt to the uniqueness of the Pacific Northwest. The book draws attention to the personal connection that is required of a minister being called to a city. If a planter failed to have that personal connection towards a community, it is not likely they will have a sustainable ministry. They state,

When church planters move to a city, wanting to transform it but not willing to be transformed by it, they generally do not last. Love always changes the lover. When church planters or their spouses are so fearful or frustrated by a city's streets that they won't explore them by walking, driving, or taking public transportation, they generally do not last.²⁰

The next strength of the book is the cultural exegetical, and practical, work in recognizing and understanding the marginalized and overlooked by most churches, yet, historically, has always been a target demographic of the church. Before focusing on reaching hipsters, creatives, and influential individuals within a city,²¹ Bergquist and Crane draw attention to the narratives and plight of the poor, immigrants, night shift workers, refugees, and seniors. When most planters envision planting, these aren't usually the

¹⁹ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 629.

²⁰ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1075.

²¹ Ibid., The topic of chapter seven.

target demographic, but there is usually an unreached population within every city and this book is a great reminder that in order to be more faithful and a church for the city, the planter needs to see the whole city.

The other strength of this book is that it details how a planter can apply their own cultural exegesis and best practices within their own context. This encompasses the initial networking required in the city, understanding and determining the rhythms of the city. This book is also broad in its scope of what is expected of the planter in terms of spiritual maturity and vitality and what tasks the planter needs to focus on.

One of the greatest insights from this book its description of the most valuable character trait for successfully planting a church. The book notes,

Research on church planters in Belgium discovered determination made the difference in seeing churches started: Determination was the crucial factor: regardless of training, theology, or the population density of the target region, those church planters who persevered in their mission for a decade or more succeeded in establishing a viable church.²²

This book is probably the best introduction for understanding the posture and practices of urban planting. For those who want to see the challenges, opportunities, and best practices of modern-day missiologists, this book is essential.

The Church and Its Vocation: Leslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology by Michael Goheen

Michael Goheen has been a prominent voice of missional theology for several decades. He currently serves as Professor of Missional Theology at Covenant Theological

²² Ibid. Kindle Loc. 1075.

Seminary and the Director of Theological Education, Missional Training Center. His work has been extending the missional theology of Leslie Newbigin and translating it for a new generation and a new century. His recent work *The Church and Its Vocation* is the most comprehensive, and systematic presentation of Newbigin's missional theology and ecclesiology. This book presents Newbigin's greatest contributions in a way that can be adopted by various churches for meeting the challenges of secularism and opportunities in the West. "The fourfold dynamic that drives Newbigin's thought: gospel, story, missional people, and missionary encounter with culture."²³ Rather than wanting to jettison the theological distinctions of the previous generations or historical orthodoxy, this book shows how Newbigin was able to reimagine historical categories to equip the church for her new cultural milieu.

As such, both Goheen and Newbigin begins with "Bible" and the gospel. Goheen notes,

If we start with the gospel, we find ourselves in the middle of the "Bible" as one story whose central thread is the missional vocation of God's people, a people who necessarily live out their calling in a missionary encounter with culture. This dynamic expresses something intrinsic to the Christian faith. It also shows how central a missionary ecclesiology is to scripture.²⁴

There is an interdependent relationship between the gospel, the Bible, the movement of God, and the involvement of the people of God; all are interconnected. To do full justice to the biblical narrative requires emphasizing the importance of the Bible: the gospel and the missionary trajectory. These dynamics are a powerful motivation that can animate the

²³ Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 9.

²⁴ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 375.

mission and vision of many church planters who see planting as the result of God's continued missionary activity.

These dynamics present a participatory view of God's involvement in the world that undergirds the nature of the gospel and role of the church. It resists the error of previous generations, which had reduced the gospel to soul-salvation,²⁵ and it expands the gospel to cosmological implications. Goheen states, "Salvation is as wide as creation, and it is the restoration of the sin-corrupted creation back to its original purpose. That is the goal of universal history. The cosmic scope of salvation is the restoration of the entirety of human life in the midst of the nonhuman creation."²⁶ Within this understanding of salvation, it expands the importance of the gospel and how it equips the church to live deliberately in its context. It shapes the understanding of worship, informs the congregation's view of vocation and life, and resonates with many of the values of our context.

To help understand how the gospel connects with the church, Goheen draws attention to the way that Newbigin understood the Greek term, *ekklesia* in contrast to other terms, such as *heranos* or *thiasos*. Goheen notes,

In the New Testament, *ekklesia* is accompanied by the words "of God." The church is the public assembly of God. The one who calls out this public assembly is not the town clerk but God himself. In every place God calls forth his new humanity as a representative and public body to which he calls all people. The church is the firstfruit in each city of God's assembled new humanity. *Ekklesia* is the church's self-chosen name. By contrast, the enemies of the church employed other terms such as *heranos* and *thiasos*. These words interpreted the church not as the new humankind but as a private religious cult that offered personal and

²⁵ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), ch 2.ff.

²⁶ Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, Kindle Loc. 833.

otherworldly salvation. These religious communities fit nicely in the private realm of life and did not challenge the public doctrine of the Roman Empire. The church refused to adopt this designation of a private religious fraternity. They saw themselves as the new humanity, called into the end-time kingdom by God and launched into the public life of the Roman Empire to challenge all competing allegiances. Since the salvation of the kingdom is as wide as the creation, This is what drove the church to adopt the title *ekklesia* and refuse any terms that gave it the identity of a private religious body. Newbigin's conclusion is that, sadly, today in the West, "church" usually means something closer to *heranos* and *thiasos* than to *ekklesia*. The church has forgotten its eschatological existence as the new humankind called out by God and has accepted the designation of private religious body concerned for personal and otherworldly salvation.²⁷

By reclaiming this biblical understanding of the *ekklesia*, Goheen presents a vision for the types of churches we are called to plant. Rather than settling for a detached, private, religious community, the church should be the embodiment of an eschatological reality that serves as a counter-cultural place of hope.

Redeemer Church Planting Manual by Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church

Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in New York City has established itself as a "church planting church." To assist these planting endeavors, Timothy Keller and J. Allen Thompson created a *Redeemer Church Planting Manual* in 2002, and established City to City (formerly the Redeemer Church Planting Center), a church planting cooperative that seeks to plant churches in strategic global and urban contexts. City to City claims that since "January 2018, City to City has helped start 495 new churches in

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

70 cities, trained more than 16,000 leaders.”²⁸ To date, Redeemer Church Planting Manual may be the most extensive and thorough church planting manual available.

The manual begins by establishing the principles for planting churches, exegeting the culture and context of the location, the stages of planting a church, renewal dynamics, and changing the context of the city. The manual draws attention to the errors that Hunter warns against in *To Change the World*. Keller notes the planter’s goal is to “know the gospel thoroughly; communicate not a click toward law or license. The gospel brings life-changing power. [And also] Know the culture, and adapt not a click too little or too much. Thoughtful contextualization brings cultural-transforming power.”²⁹

The manual, though not widely circulated, is the most thorough and comprehensive resource for church planting. It is the toolbox a planter would need to own the church planting vision, learning and planning for launching the church, launching the church, spiritual renewal dynamics, and changing the fabric of the city. This process encompasses the entire life of the church plant from preparing, gathering, launching, and replicating. Each section is comprised of three sub-chapters including theological and doctrinal explanation, cultural exegesis, and how it could be applicable for the future planter. Additionally, there are many test cases, exercises, and sample documents used by other planters. The magnitude of the manual is impressive but potentially overwhelming to a new planter or to those exploring planting.

²⁸ “Redeemer City to City Annual Report,” Redeemer City to City, accessed June 24, 2019, https://issuu.com/leemarcum/docs/ctc_ar2016_final_pages.

²⁹ Keller, *Redeemer Church Planting Manual*, 45.

The greatest strength of the manual (aside from its comprehensiveness) is the openness in being descriptive, suggestive, but not explicitly prescriptive. It provides the rationale for planting, but provides principles that can be applied in various ways. This feature is anchored in John Frame's tri-perspectivalism: the idea that all knowledge is three-fold. Frame states, "Human knowledge can be understood in three ways: as knowledge of God's norm [the "Bible"]; as knowledge of the situation [context]; and knowledge of ourselves [existential]. None can be achieved adequately without the others. Each includes the others. Each, therefore, is a 'perspective on the whole of human knowledge.'³⁰

The strength of using tri-perspectivalism is that Keller articulates a model of church planting that is intrinsically flexible to accounting for all three perspectives. This means that the church plant should be an interaction of three distinct elements;

Theological/ecclesiological commitment in how they understand the Bible (normative perspective), understanding the needs and capacities of the culture in context to which the planter is going (situational/contextual perspective), and understanding the gifts, calling, and experience of the planter (existential perspective).³¹

By accounting for each perspective, the planter can develop a philosophy of ministry that is theologically robust, sensitive to the context in which they are going, while catering to the strengths of the planter. The church plant should ideally be the convergence of all three perspectives.

³⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1987), 74.

³¹ Keller, *Redeemer Church Planting Manual*, 92.

This idea of tri-perspectivalism serves as the implicit foundation of the planting manual to guide the planter in establishing a theological foundation, a cultural and contextual sensitivity, and embracing their gifts and experiences as unique contribution towards their plant. Most church planting works either focus on the first or second category, but rarely does a work arise that asks the planter to view their plant as the convergence of all three. While New York was thoroughly post-Christian at the time when the manual was written (2002), there are certain areas that feel dated, overstated, or incorrect. Keller has an overemphasis and priority on reaching cities, thereby ignoring the importance of less urban areas. He states, “the way to most permanently influence the country was through its chief cities. The way to permanently influence a city was to plant churches in it.”³² In an age of globalization and connectivity, this is no longer the case. In many ways, there is a reciprocal amount of influence that can come from each demographic. This is especially the case in the Northwest, where the Far West may be at odds with the Left Coast and be inherently resistant to its influence.

Second, the manual fails to understand the ideology of secularism. Keller more often interprets post-Christendom into the often-misunderstood categories of “traditional, modern, and post-modern.” This is a product of its time, and many more works since 2002 have emerged. For example, Taylor’s *Secular Age* has demonstrated that these categories (i.e. traditional, modern, and post-modern) can co-exist within secularism and many of these categories can be expressions of secularism.

³² Cf. Ibid., 29ff.

Overall, the Redeemer Church Planting Manual is an invaluable resource. While there are many things that could be better nuanced, the manual serves as a profound inspiration to the planter.

Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice by Christopher James

Christopher James is Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Missional Christianity at Dubuque Theological Seminary, Iowa. His work analyzes the current trends of Church Planting in Seattle as a test-case for planting in a post-Christian context. He notes,

National trends indicate that Seattle provides a better glimpse of our collective destiny. Not only is Seattle one of the most post-Christian cities in an increasingly post-Christian nation, it is also one of the fastest-growing, most technological, and most progressive cities in a nation whose population is becoming increasingly urban, technological, and progressive.³³

These reasons make Seattle the perfect incubator to examine the various models for planting in a post-Christian context. Within this work, James identifies four different models of practical ecclesiology in church planting in Seattle. Each model has a different proposal and posture for planting in Seattle. These four different models are; Great Commission Team, the Household of the Spirit, the New Community, and the Neighborhood Incarnation.

Rather than presenting a prescriptive paradigm for church planting in Seattle, his book is mostly descriptive in addressing the “Ecclesiopraxis”³⁴ of each model. The

³³ James, *Planting in Post-Christian Soil*, Kindle Loc. 173.

³⁴ James defines, “Ecclesiopraxis” is the whole constellation of theory-laden practices that animate a particular church or practical ecclesiological model.” Ibid., Kindle Loc. 292.

Ecclesiopraxis of each model has distinct understandings for spirituality, missions, and identity, each of which informs their model of planting. James notes,

These four models, it is worth stressing, are not offered merely as illustrated sociological types or idealized theological constructs. They are practical ecclesiologies, reflecting an integration of disciplinary methods infused with an overarching belief in the presence of God among the churches and an orienting intention that their explication may serve the church, both in its doctrinal self-understanding and in its task of faithful contextual witness.³⁵

Therefore, each model possesses a different expression in worship, evangelism, neighborhood presence, and spiritual formation. He is fair in presenting the various models and warns that, “Dismissing models—even those with serious theological weaknesses and practical flaws—would be both misguided and futile, since churches in each of these models will continue to be started.”³⁶

The book is a strong sociological effort that demonstrates a large degree of work in discerning the challenges of church planting in Seattle. The book presents comprehensive research on the ecclesiological landscape of Seattle as well. After describing the context of Seattle and the various models, he assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each model. The paradigm that James uses for assessing each model begins with the missional theology of Leslie Newbigin. By relying on the works of Newbigin, James understands that there is a “third-way” of missional theology that is distinct to the attempts of twentieth century liberal Protestantism (assimilation into culture) or fundamental Evangelicalism (alienation from culture). He notes, “as Newbigin stressed, the gospel does speak a “No” to every culture, but also a “Yes.” The truly

³⁵ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2910.

³⁶ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 3903.

missional church is not only a contrast society but also a community that names and celebrates the inbreaking Reign of God as it is currently reflected in their context.”³⁷

Each model reflects that tension, but emphasizes it in different ways. It is worth describing each model, because within a tri-perspectival understanding, each model could potentially be a faithful and strategic expression of the planter’s identity, context, and theological tradition.

Great Commission Teams (GCT) are “highly conscious of Seattle’s post-Christian status, progressive values, urban character, and technological culture; and they engage with each of these characteristics with intentionality. GCT churches describe their context as an urgent and strategic mission field.”³⁸ James notes that GCT churches describe themselves as “‘Gospel-centered’ churches and their recurrent invocation of ‘the Gospel’ demonstrates the importance of the designation.”³⁹ These churches tend to follow more traditional models of planting and expression in worship, and they are representative of more non-denominational and evangelical churches as they “embrace and embody a mission-driven ecclesiology.”⁴⁰ This is one of the most common patterns of church plants, comprising twenty-five percent of new churches in Seattle.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 3393.

³⁸ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1954.

³⁹ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2101.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1931.

⁴¹ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1923.

In contrast to the GCT, James presents the Household of the Spirit (HS), which accounts for roughly thirty percent of new churches in Seattle. In contrast to the GCT, HS churches “enacts the church as a family of faith who experience the power and presence of God’s Spirit in a foreign or unfriendly environment.”⁴² The identity of these churches are

“building a refuge from the world,” and “witnessing to and experiencing God’s miracle-working power,” along with significant identifications with an ethnic minority and Pentecostal or Charismatic denomination. These churches, predictably, have much continuity with the wider fields of Pentecostal, Charismatic, and ethnic congregations.⁴³

Following paradigms within Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*,⁴⁴ HS churches are “Christ above Culture” by creating a worshipping community distinct from the world, they seek to invited others into their set apart community to experience the power of God’s presence.

The third model of churches in James’ sociological survey is the New Community (NC) model. Only “10% of new Seattle churches share key features of the New Community (NC) model.”⁴⁵ Most of the churches in the NC model are within mainline denominations are emergent, or identify, as the “emerging church.”⁴⁶ James notes,

This practical ecclesiology [of NC churches] brings together eschatological and institutional hopes for renewal and sets its community-centered progressivism in contrast to dogmatic, countercultural, exclusivist, and proselytizing expressions of Christianity. Commonalities among NC churches include progressive cultural and

⁴² Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2281.

⁴³ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2285.

⁴⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975).

⁴⁵ James, *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil*, Kindle Loc. 2346.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2442.

spiritual values, sacramental-liturgical worship practices, identification with mainline Protestant denominations, and a core mission commitment to creating a community of belonging that—along with their practices of contemplation and advocacy—witnesses to their values.⁴⁷

This model, while largely waning in national attention, still provides a viable and innovative approach to different contexts through four distinct ways. First, they distinguish themselves from the older, dogmatic, approaches of church thought which sought to broadly condemn culture. Second, they are conscious about being an innovative and creative expression of their denominations (a new wave of ecclesiology within these older structures). Third, while being new, they intentionally renew liturgical and sacramental practices while seeking to integrate them with contemporary technology. Fourth, James notes, “they can be represented theologically as sacraments of the new humanity; they are communities that celebrate their ordinariness but also view themselves in an eschatological light.”⁴⁸ The NC model seeks to employ an ancient expression of church while embracing more progressive ideals theologically, culturally, and socially.

The fourth practical ecclesiological model is that of Neighborhood Incarnation (NI), which is James’ preference. He notes,

They reflect a strong place-based identity, a commitment to contribute to their neighborhoods and make a socially embodied witness, and a spirituality that is both mission centered and community centered. The Neighborhood Incarnation model describes about 25% of the field, including churches from both sides of the wide divide between Evangelicals and Progressives.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2438.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2475.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2684.

The NI model in many ways reflects some of the strength of the previous models, while not being a composite of them. Reflecting the missional theology found in GCT teams, NI churches seek to immerse themselves within a locale and seek to build social and institutional relationships. They follow the HS model and seek a holy set-apart, intimate community to experience the work of God in the community; and like NC, see themselves as an eschatological community. For James, he observes,

The Neighborhood Incarnation model is anchored in a fundamental identification with the local neighborhood as a God-given parish. It is within their immediate contexts—understood as sites of beauty, need, and hope—that these followers of Jesus seek both to experience God’s presence and to join in God’s mission.⁵⁰

These four models of church planting provide a helpful analysis for the ways that various planters, churches, and denominations are trying to plant more churches in Seattle. These models constitute the newest wave of planting and while this is not comprehensive of every church, is representative of the most current and recent church planting proposals.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 2894.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

THREE THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

Western Christianity has developed alongside Western culture in biblical understanding, theological convictions, and ecclesiological expression. Two traditions that have blossomed over the past 500 years is the Reformed tradition, transforming into a neo-Reformed expression, and the Anabaptist tradition into a neo-Anabaptist movement. Although both movements appear to be reactionary and contradictory to the other, both are viable expressions of the true church and can learn from one another. While the history and theological nuances of both movements are outside the scope of this paper, they are necessary to discuss as both traditions offer strengths for church planting especially in this cultural milieu. However, the strengths of both movements are not innovative or unique to the Western church; rather, the strengths of these traditions are contained and expressed in the early Celtic Church, the third theological tradition considered.

Neo-Reformed Tradition

Historically, the Reformed tradition is understood as the churches that participated in the Reformation, but is generally recognized as emerging within either Scottish Presbyterian (PCUSA, PCA, OPC, EPC, etc.) or Dutch Continental contexts (RCA, CRC, URC, etc.).¹ The expression of Reformed theology that has greatly influenced the broader church is that of neo-Reformed movement, sometimes known as neo-Calvinism. The neo-Calvinism movement is older, and in contradistinction, to modern movements commonly understood as the “young, restless, reformed” movement of Acts 29, Gospel Coalition, or Nine Marks. Rather, neo-Calvinism is the theological tradition that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos and sphere sovereignty of Abraham Kuyper. This tradition has influenced many modern thinkers such as Richard Mouw, Timothy Keller, James K. A. Smith and Kevin Vanhoozer. This tradition has made four distinct contributions for the broader church. First, biblical theology, is understood as the study of the biblical narrative as the progressive unfolding drama of God culminating and climaxing in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus thereby creating a Christo-centric hermeneutic.² Second, biblical theology has further developed through the works of Reformed theologian Kevin Vanhoozer who articulates not just a narrative

¹ While other traditions emerged during the Reformation (e.g. Episcopal, Lutheran). However, these traditions are usually viewed and treated outside of the “Reformed” tradition. While they can be included within the Reformation they are historically and currently, not recognized as being “Reformed.”

² While both biblical theology, and a Christo-centric hermeneutic is not unique to the Reformed Faith, the Reformed Faith is the first tradition to explicitly make a science as distinct part of theological loci. Most modern biblical theologians (e.g. N.T. Wright), in many ways is popularizing the same biblical theology of the neo-Reformed movement.

understanding of scripture, but a theodramatic one.³ Third, the Reformed understanding of shalom and sphere sovereignty provides a way of understanding the role, posture, and hope of cultural engagement. Finally, Reformed theology has articulated a uniquely eschatological position positing eschatology precedes soteriology and fuels missiology.

Biblical Theology

One of the characteristics of modernist theology has been the overemphasis on systematized truth and structures. The goal of distilling the biblical narrative into logical and rational arguments and apologetics, has proved ineffective in post-modern and secular contexts. The consequence of systematized truths reduced the biblical drama to prooftexts for theological categories. While there is great value in systematic theology, it needs to be in conversation with biblical theology, as both are interrelated as Geerhardus Vos notes, “In biblical theology the principle is one of historical development, in Systematic Theology, it is one of logical construction. Biblical Theology draws a line of development. Systematic Theology draws a circle.”⁴ Although systematized theology is true and helpful, it does not highlight the unfolding narrative as presented in the Bible. By emphasizing biblical theology over systematic theology, it organizes the material as it unfolds and develops in the “Bible”, showing the primacy in narrative over logic. When one encounters this approach, it allows the various threads of the biblical narrative (e.g.

³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1975), 16.

work, power, resources, culture, community etc.) to progress within a creation, Fall, and redemption paradigm. This progressively unfolding narrative embraces the gospel as the climax of each storyline, thereby allowing the gospel to restore each narrative thread. This emphasis and expression of biblical theology is inherently gospel-centric.⁵ However, a priority of biblical theology can lead to some unfortunate errors; but incorporating a theodramtic approach minimizes these errors while expanding its application, especially as it applies to ecclesiology.

Theodramatic Model

Theologian Kevin Vanhoozer expands the historical understanding of biblical theology by noting the “story” of biblical theology is insufficient, as it can lead to merely speculating or observing the narrative and can excuse the interpreter in applying and living truths. To minimize this error, Vanhoozer proposes viewing the biblical story as a theodrama to be entered. He describes theodrama as,

The imaginative framework that lies at the heart of scripture and thus ties together all the things done and all the words made therein. These words and deeds, taken together, serve as the interpretative framework through which Christians think, make sense of their experience, decide what to do and how to do it. The theodrama is the framework for *living* the Christian life.⁶

This understanding preserves the narrative arc of scripture, but rather than just highlighting the different description of story; it envelops believers within this storied-

⁵ Cf. works of Reformed and Presbyterian Theologians Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Meredith Kline, etc.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness and Wisdom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 168.

drama as a participant. Vanhoozer continues, “Unlike narrative stories, however, where the medium is words, or film, where the medium is celluloid images, the medium of drama is the living presence of persons.”⁷ By appropriating biblical theology through a theodramatic lens, it affirms both the story of God and enlists the church as actors/actresses within that story. This allows for unity in the over-arching narrative in individual lives (creation, Fall, redemption), as well as creative expressions of that narrative in different people’s lives, stories, and context.

Theodrama shows how the biblical narrative is applicable in all areas of life: relationally, culturally, socially, and vocationally. To fully understand how the gospel connects and resonates within each area of life, the Reformed understanding of *shalom* and sphere sovereignty offers another unique reformed contribution.

Shalom, Spheres, and Culture

The third theological distinction considered within the Reformed faith is the emphasis and understanding of shalom and how it may be applied through sphere sovereignty. The Reformed understanding of shalom is greater than the English equivalent of peace. In describing shalom, James Hunter states,

Shalom is a vision of order and harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, and well-being. For the Christian, this was God’s intention in creation and it is his promise for the new heaven and new earth. In this light, the entire biblical narrative centers around the shalom God intended and that he will, one day, restore.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228.

Within this theological understanding of shalom, peace is not the absence of strife or conflict, but is understood positively the flourishing of all aspects of life. This multi-dimensional understanding is enhanced by a robust understanding of culture and spheres. If culture is part of the inherent design within creation, then spheres become the context of differentiating cultural institutions and their respective expressions of flourishing. Abraham Kuyper articulated these spheres when recognizing the various institutions within life and culture. In describing Kuyper's theology of spheres Richard Mouw states,

What Kuyper meant by a "sphere" is pretty much what we have in mind when we talk about a person's "sphere of influence." It is an arena where interactions take place, and where some sort of authority is exercised. He is pointing us to some obvious patterns of cultural interaction - family life, business, art, the university, church, state - and he is saying that each of these is intended by God to do its own "thing"; each has a different role or "point" in God's design for his creation.⁹

Ultimately, these spheres are distinct, but not divorced, from one another. Rather, they work collaboratively, and interdependently, and they contribute to the enhancement and flourishing on each other's spheres. Mouw continues, "In spelling out his thoughts on sphere sovereignty, Kuyper was insisting that we cannot stop at talking about the state's God-given authority. He wanted to view political authority in a larger context, portraying the state's role against the background of a larger tapestry of human interaction."¹⁰ This tapestry of human interaction is a manifestation of shalom. Culture, spheres, and shalom establish the theological presuppositions and context that encourages vocational and cultural engagement in the world. In this way, these spheres not aimless. Rather, because

⁹ Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), Kindle Loc 229-232.

¹⁰ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 294.

of the eschatological vision of Revelation 20-21 and Isaiah 60, we know the end and *telos* of these spheres, they are being redeemed for the glory of God. Within this theodramatic, biblical theology of spheres, Jesus promises, “I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). This conviction informs the understanding that eschatology precedes soteriology.

Resolving the Drama: Eschatology Precedes Soteriology

The final Reformed distinctive considered is the role of eschatology. While strange to contemplate the doctrine of last things (eschatology) preceding salvation (soteriology), this emphasis is not only biblically accurate, but animating for the life of the church and church planting. When comparing the first couple chapters of the “Bible” in Genesis to the concluding chapters of Revelation, the final vision is not merely a return to the garden, but a progression and glorification of the first garden. Peter Leithart notes, “The Christian account of history is eschatological not only in the sense that it comes to a definitive and everlasting end, but in the sense that the end is a glorified beginning, not merely a return to origins. The Christian “Bible” moves not from garden lost to garden restored, but from garden to garden city.”¹¹ The vision of the end is present in the beginning of creation, and the Fall merely changed the means of accomplishing this vision, which is by means of the gospel. The idea for the Garden City was present in the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, “God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

¹¹ Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Comedy: Trinity, Tragedy, & Hope In Western Literature* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2006), xi.

heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Meredith Kline recognizes this consummation goal when he states,

In his preparing of the garden in Eden (Gen 2:8, 9) the Creator provided man with a paradigm for performing the cultural assignment of developing the city. For the garden arrangement represented a cultural ordering of the natural world. It was a bounded area (cf. Gen 3:23-24), shaped and stocked to accommodate its human occupants. While the boundaries served to consecrate the garden as sacred space, they also marked off man’s domain from nature not-yet-culturally-structured. The garden was the incipient city of God. Confirming the garden’s nature as polis and indeed as prototypal Metapolis. Revelation 22 incorporates elements of the garden of Eden like the tree and river of life in its portrayal of the eternal city, New Jerusalem (vv.1, 2).¹²

Although the vision and goal of the garden city was innate within Adam’s commission, the means to this city shifted after the Fall. Rather than the garden city coming into fruition through fulfillment of the cultural mandate of the first Adam, it is accomplished through the redemptive work of the second Adam, Christ. In this way, it is correct to state that Eschatology, the heavenly vision for unification of heaven and earth, precedes soteriology and the need for salvation.¹³

Synthesizing Reformed Contributions for Planting

These Reformed distinctions provide a theological foundation and presupposition that is indispensable in church planting. By having a Christo-centric/gospel hermeneutic of biblical theology, the planter embraces a worldview that understands every story

¹² Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2006), 217.

¹³ This approach is taken by Peter Jenson’s oft-neglected book Peter Jenson, *At the Heart of the Universe: The Eternal Plan of God* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1997). Jenson’s work begins with eschatology to establish a paradigm for creation, salvation, and church.

within the narrative arc of creation, Fall, redemption, consummation. This equips the planter to identify the cultural and personal narratives of the community and provide a nuanced response from the gospel. This theodramatic understanding guards the planter from perceiving their labors as merely a witness to the gospel, but a participant within the gospel story of renewal. The planter's life, ministry, and church planting are indispensable within this theodrama. This creates meaning and helps the church realize the Spirit-empowered resources that are available within this era of biblical history.¹⁴ The gospel becomes much more than personal salvation, but is applicable to all areas, or spheres, of life and each sphere of life needs gospel renewal.¹⁵ By understanding the eschatological nature of church planting, it enables the planter to recognize that the ends do not justify the means, but rather regulates them as they seek to be consistently gospel-centered in all aspects of planting. In addition to the contributions of the reformed tradition, the neo-Anabaptist tradition offers valuable insights as well.

Neo-Anabaptist Tradition

Another tradition that has contributed to the global church over the past 500 years is the neo-Anabaptist tradition. It emerged alongside the Reformed tradition, but with different theological and ecclesiological emphasis. The contributions of the neo-Anabaptist tradition are important and should not be overlooked. The first emphasis is on community and how it is shaped by the gospel and values relating to the gospel.

¹⁴ Mark Sayers, *Strange Days: Life in the Spirit in a Time of Upheaval* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 125ff.

¹⁵ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, Kindle Loc 2486ff.

Secondly, the formation of a gospel-centered community expresses itself in a critical posture towards engaging culture. This posture is seen as one of forming a counter-culture and trying to create new systems of health, rather than trying to work within existing or toxic systems. Finally, the emphasis on the gospel-shaped community that functions as a counter-cultural society, creates a place where hospitality is practiced missionally.

Gospel-Centered Community

In contrast to a reformed view of soteriology that is inherently focused on the individual, or plan of salvation, the neo-Anabaptist tradition has understood salvation to be expressed more corporately such as incorporation within the church, equality within the church, and the practice of reconciliation between one another (e.g. holding Eph 2.11-20 as important as Eph. 2.1-10). Finch notes, “Reconciliation is so central to the good news of what God has done in Christ that to see no reconciliation in our churches suggests there is no gospel in them.”¹⁶ John Yoder reinforces Fitch in noting that the gospel is a theological reality that must manifest in redemptive, reconciling practices. Yoder states,

To be human is to be in conflict, to offend and to be offended. To be human in the light of the gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it. When we do that, we demonstrate that to process conflict is not merely a palliative strategy for tolerable survival or psychic hygiene, but a

¹⁶ David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 72.

mode of truth-finding and community-building. That is true in the gospel; it is also true, *mut at is mutandis*, in the world.¹⁷

Thus, reconciliation with God is as important as reconciliation with neighbor and living as, and within, gospel community. This is why baptism is so important within the Anabaptist tradition. Baptism introduces the individual into this new community, which is a new humanity. The sacrament of baptism, depicting Jesus' death and resurrection, transforms the individual's identity into a new corporate identity that transcends earthly delineations. As Yoder describes,

Baptism introduces or initiates persons into a new people. The distinguishing mark of this people is that all prior given or chosen identity definitions are transcended. In this passage Paul is defending the missionary policies, for which he was being criticized, according to which on principle he makes Jews and Gentiles pray and eat together.¹⁸

Therefore, the gospel that brings the person into the community is the same gospel that must be practiced communally. The emphasis of the social realities of the gospel is one of the hallmarks and distinctives of the neo-Anabaptist tradition. This emphasis is not to deny the reality of personal salvation, but rather to understand personal salvation within the context of the broader community. This manifests with the unique posture of the neo-Anabaptist tradition towards culture.

Posture of Engagement within Culture

In addition to the emphasis of gospel community, neo-Anabaptists are more

¹⁷ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2001), Kindle Loc. 340.

¹⁸ Ibid., Kindle Loc. 597.

cautious about engagement within broader culture. They understand the errors and challenges of the church when she has aligned herself with empire. Rather than embodying the realities of the kingdom, the church jettisons her prophetic voice, calling, and identity. This is why the post-Christendom era can provide new opportunities for a more faithful expression of the Kingdom. David Fitch articulates this view when he states,

This church has been dislodged, for instance, when it has aligned itself with worldly power. Too often we rely on government or money to do the work of God's presence. We lose our calling. Likewise, whenever the church focuses on self-preservation, keeping people happy, coming back every Sunday, and filling the offering plates, the church turns in on itself and loses its way again. Down through the annals of church history, under the pressure of keeping the church going, time and again we Christians have lost the call to be God's faithful presence in the world.¹⁹

Fitch argues that when the church focuses more on her economy (what she does), rather than her ontology (embodying the faithful presence of God), she loses the identity that distinguishes the kingdom from earthly kingdoms. Because this had happened historical within Christendom (i.e. time of Constantine to Post-modernity), Anabaptist traditions are critical of a relationship with the broader culture. Yoder noted these errors within the Reformed tradition, especially where sphere sovereignty has been appropriated towards sinful ends. Yoder states,

The natural effect of this vision of authority structures being anchored in the structures of "creation" is of course conservative and patriarchal. Its strongest voices in our time have been the Reformed rulers of South Africa and Northern Ireland. A century and a half ago in the United States, it provided the strongest argument in favor of slavery.²⁰

¹⁹ Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, p. 30.

²⁰ Yoder, *Body Politics*, Kindle Loc. 556.

Alternatively, when the emphasis is on gospel community, mutual submission, and forming a counter-culture, the engagement with culture can be deliberate and impactful. For example, rather than being assimilated into existing cultures, the church can be both a witness against destructive cultures and a haven from which those in culture can thrive. To further illustrate this posture, David Fitch analyzes the role of the church within the civil rights movement, and how models of Martin Luther King Jr and Malcom X are differentiated from the Anabaptist model of engagement. Building off James Cones' *Martin & Malcom & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*,²¹ Fitch argues that an Anabaptist perspective could have been a synthesis to the strength of both movements. Fitch states,

The early Martin Luther King understood nonviolence, but he subsumed the Black concerns into white ones. He integrated Blacks into existing white society not understanding that white society was polluted with corrupt power relationships. This was Malcolm X's critique of MLK. On the other hand, Malcolm X understood the need for an inherent identity or else the Black American would get obliterated by the white dominant culture, but he didn't understand nonviolence like Martin Luther King. Anabaptist thought, in my opinion, brings the nonviolence of Martin Luther King and the integrity of each culture of Malcolm X, including the African American, together in one mutual submission space with all races, and God creates a new thing. The practices of mutual submission, nonviolence, communal hermeneutics, local engaged practices of Eucharist, reconciliation of being with one another — those are the places where that can happen. And the Anabaptists should be at the forefront of that.²²

²¹ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012).

²² Carmen Andres, "Evangelicalism, Anabaptism, and Being the Church in a Post-Christian Culture," *Anabaptist Witness*, October 15, 2014, https://www.Anabaptistwitness.org/journal_entry/evangelicalism-anabaptism-and-being-the-church-in-a-post-christian-culture-an-interview-with-david-fitch/. Accessed February 11, 2020

While the issue of race is complicated, this succinct description describes the presupposition and ideology of the neo-Anabaptist engagement with culture. While not avoiding the issues of injustice within the broader culture, neo-Anabaptism seeks to engage it in a manner that is consistent with and informed by the gospel for a more robust community. It does not use its power or influence in a way that reflects worldly power. However, engagement is not merely an expressive action and the neo-Anabaptist tradition understands that one of the greatest strengths is receptive engagements, which is found through hospitality.

Hospitality

Historically, both the Reformed and Anabaptist tradition emerged in a posture of hospitality, but Anabaptists incorporated it further into their distinctives. Noting the historical role of hospitality, Christine Pohl notes, “Hospitality was an important practice for the early Protestants as they attempted both to survive and to prevail in the religious and political upheavals of that time. It was also so significant in the early Anabaptist experience as believers sought refuge from persecution and cared for families of martyrs.”²³ Both David Fitch and John Yoder refer to hospitable practices within the church, such as eucharist or Lord’s Supper. These practices are not merely pragmatic or programmatic, but rather regular rhythms that create gospel space of counter-community. These practices are inherently hospitable. Concerning the eucharist, Yoder notes,

²³ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 52. Furthermore, Pohl argues that “the Anabaptist practice of hospitality was subsumed under the category of mutual aid.”

Anthropologist will tell us, in many settings eating together “stands for” values of hospitality and community-formation, said values being distinguishable from the signs that refer to them. It is that bread is daily sustenance. Bread eaten together is economic sharing. Not merely symbolically, but also in fact, eating together extends to a wider circle the economic solidarity normally obtained in the family.²⁴

Something as simple as the Lord’s table is used to create a social and economic reality that welcomes the outcast and marginalized into the church. Fitch notes that the Lord’s Supper becomes a model by which we understand how to invite others into our personal tables, thereby embodying Christ’s presence to them. This embodying is a form of mission. Fitch states,

Most typically, this table takes place in homes in neighborhoods. But it can happen wherever Christians meet regularly to share a meal in the hospitality of Christ’s presence together in the neighborhood (at restaurants, parks, community centers, preschools, etc.). This meal is initiated by a Christian, hosted by a Christian, and yet is always open and hospitable to strangers who are becoming regular parts of our lives. In these places the close circle table on Sunday is extended to a more open space, a porous circle, in the neighborhood, where there are entry points for strangers to be among us and taste of the kingdom.²⁵

Within the Anabaptist tradition, the themes of egalitarian emphasis, forming a counter-community, and mutual submission creates a community where everyone can experience the presence of God, and likewise, embody God’s presence to others.

Synthesizing neo-Anabaptist Contributions for Planting

The neo-Anabaptist tradition has the practices and presuppositions that have allowed it to flourish in the North American church planting movement. By embracing

²⁴ Yoder, *Body Politics*, Kindle Loc. 469.

²⁵ Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 56.

core theological commitments and shared practices, it provides for more freedom in planting by allowing those commitments to be expressed contextually in urban, suburban, and rural areas. This contextualization is culturally sensitive to foster organic expressions within minority communities. Whereas the neo-Reformed tradition creates a system and ideology articulating the gospel, the neo-Anabaptist movements embodies the realities of the gospel through various practices within the church. However, further back in the history of the church, the Celtic Church expressed the strengths of both movements in harmony.

Celtic Tradition

The Celtic Church emerged in the wake of a new and changing cultural landscape after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Although Christianity was present among the Britannia earlier, it was the product of Roman expansion and militarization, and, likewise, it crumbled alongside the collapse of the Roman Empire. “Roman Christianity had previously been brought across the land and was based on urban centres and, in structure, reflected the Roman State System.”²⁶ This alien and foreign model could not grow in the far reaches of the empire. In recognizing the difficulty of governing frontier mission on the fringes of the known world, the Council of Ephesus made a ruling that allowed for the emergence and creative expression of missionary movements, such as the Celtic Church. While the ruling looked like a logistical matter to help geographically-isolated churches, the implications were staggering. The eighth

²⁶ Martin Wallace, *The Celtic Resource Book* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2009), 11.

cannon from the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) prevented bishops from interfering in foreign territories, and therefore, allowed regions of churches to be more autonomous, though connected through heritage, tradition, and theology. This ruling also allowed churches in pioneer situations to embody a unique ministry expression that was deeply contextual. This expression was not sectarian for the Celtic Church, but rather an opportunity for the church to become an indigenous expression of the catholic faith. In many ways, this ruling gave the permission needed for the church to faithfully follow Christ in those new contexts. By considering the expression and posture of the Celtic church, church planting in new frontiers can be connected to a larger tradition and effectively reach new regions with the same message of the gospel.

Fresh Expressions of Christianity

In the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire, two distinct ecclesiological models emerged, that of St. Benedict and the Celtic Church. Both approaches were seeking to live faithfully in a compromising environment, yet both approaches looked vastly different. St. Benedict's model was a repudiation of culture and engagement, and it advocated for personal piety rather than cultural engagement. Rather than trying to live amongst the people, St. Benedict sought to retreat from the world to create a community that would be characterized by Christian ideals and principles. The goal in this was to withdrawal from the moral and social collapse of the world around them and to focus on

personal piety and religious community, hoping that it would be a successful strategy.²⁷

While there is some merit and argument to make for this case, the other option is much more difficult, yet helpful for the participants and the culture. That is the Celtic option.

The Celtic option was an adaptation and variation of the Benedictine option. Rather than the strict withdrawal from community, it sought to be faithfully present within, and yet also distinct from, the broader culture. Rather than unreflectively assimilating within the community (as the Roman Church had become in most of the empire) or being absent from the life and structures of the culture (as advocated by Benedict), the Celtic Church sought to retain their faithfulness to God, strengthening personal and communal piety, while being present to the community in which God had called them. This is demonstrated in the decision made by the Celtic Church in choosing Lindisfarne (Holy Island) and Iona for the initial center of ministry. Holy Island is located a mile from the mainland and only accessible when the tides are low and the monks could walk onto the mainland. In this way, they were separated, but also accessible to the larger community.

Similarities with the Northwest

The story and development of the Celtic Church provide many similarities and insights into reaching the cultural and spiritual milieu of the Northwest. First, although the Celtic Church was not the first expression of faith to the area, it was the most

²⁷ For current books suggesting St. Benedict's model, see works such as Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017).

effective. Similarly, while there are many previous expressions of Christendom in the Northwest, most of these expressions reflect different cultures and eras of the Christian church. The Celtic Church became effective when it sought to be an indigenous expression of faith, and, likewise, an expression of Christianity that resonates with, and is distinct from, its cultural landscape.

Second, the people of Britannia were spiritually sensitive, much like the “spiritual, but not religious” demographic that characterizes much of the Pacific Northwest. There are accounts within the Druid religious traditions that demonstrate the spiritual sensitivity of the Celtic people, especially through natural revelation. Whether the account is apocryphal, it is nonetheless remarkable that it has survived over the centuries. It is recorded that during the time of Jesus’ death, there was a conversation between King Conchubar and Bucrach, the Leinster Druid. “Conchubar notices ‘the unusual changes of the creation and the eclipse of the sun and the moon at its full’; he asked the Druid the cause of these signs, and Bucrach replies, ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is now being crucified by the Jews.’”²⁸ This account reflects the natural-spiritual sensitivity of the Celts, and is akin to the revelation of the Zoroastrian priests (magis) who visited Christ in infancy in Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 2:1-3). The Celts were spiritually sensitive to discern the spiritual nature of the eclipse as having cosmological and spiritual implications.

²⁸ Christopher Bamford and Will Marsh, *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 1987), 18.

Thirdly, the Celts were appreciative of nature and creation. In contrast with the Greco-Roman world, which viewed creation as “defiled,” or the Eastern world, which viewed creation as an “illusion,” the Celts embraced and celebrated nature. Their embrace of creation reflected the biblical understanding of the relationship between the natural world and the spiritual. Tracy Blazer states, “In their pagan, pantheistic spirituality, they [Druids] believed there were places where the line between the spirit world and the physical world was ‘tissue-paper thin.’ These pagan Celts therefore referred to and revered such sites as ‘thin places.’”²⁹ This conviction reflects biblical ideas of the Spiritual realm co-mingling with the physical world as seen in the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, and the Temple. Many in the Northwest would be willing to acknowledge something divine existing in nature.

Finally, the Celts were an egalitarian culture like the Northwest. In contrast to other cultures, Celtic women were allowed nearly all the same privileges as men, including leadership and spiritual authority. The Celtic Church was creative in their engagement of following the pattern of the larger church, while establishing practices that resonate with their culture. This included creating roles for women, whom played an important role within the life of the church, even ministering in mixed-gender friendships. This is instructive for traditions that are complementarian and unable to ordain women, as is the case in conservative denominations. The Celts discovered and

²⁹ Tracy Blazer, *Thin Places: An Evangelical Journey into Celtic Christianity* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2007), 26.

celebrated opportunities for women to use their gifts without negating gender differences.

Ray Simpson states,

They accepted the universal church custom that only men could be ordained, but because there was no clericalism, this did not have the effect of marginalizing women. When Brigid became a nun in the fifth century, one old bishop was so awestruck by the aura of holy fire above her that he unintentionally read the words for the consecration of a bishop over her. He told a remonstrating colleague: "I have no power in this matter; this dignity has been given by God to Brigid." This, I think, reflects the sense of proportion the Celtic Church kept about ecclesiastical posts in relation to spiritual callings.³⁰

Overall, the similarities of ancient Britain reflect many of the characteristics of the Pacific Northwest and provides a model to consider.

Similarities to the Neo-Reformed and Neo-Anabaptist Traditions

Donald Meek notes the difficulty of rediscovering the Celtic Church since there are very few extant writings of their age. Most of the works produced were destroyed in Viking raids following the tenth century. The tendency of the modern church has been to re-imagine the Celtic Church after its own image. This approach has been used by many to make the Celts an outpost of new age spiritualism or liberal Christianity.³¹ However, the extant works that have survived tell a fuller story. These works show that the Celtic Church reflected the rich theology of the Patristic age of the church. They grounded what they believed and lived within historic, Christian orthodoxy. While their expression was vastly different, they affirmed the faith as contained in the creeds and cherished their

³⁰ Ray Simpson, *Celtic Christianity: Deep Roots for a Modern Faith* (Vestal: Anamchara Books, 2014), 129.

³¹ Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2000), 22ff.

theology. This is seen in its emphasis on the Trinity, the role of the scriptures, the person and work of Jesus Christ,³² the importance of the church, the role and influence of the Holy Spirit, and submission to church authority. This theological commitment reflected a grounded orthodoxy that is found within both neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist movements.

The Celtic Church also reflects the uniqueness and autonomy that is found in the traditions that emerged during the Reformation. It is often assumed that the Reformation was a revolutionary movement to jettison church authority, but rather it was an attempt to re-situate church authority, reclaim historic orthodoxy, and provide healthier structure for mission. In many ways, these ideals are at the heart of the Celtic Church and resonates with both the neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist movements.

Similarities with the Neo-Reformed Tradition

One of the few extant writings we have from the Celtic Church is the prayers of the Saints. One of the most well-known is the *Breastplate of St. Patrick*. Whether written by Patrick himself or not, it nonetheless reflects the centrality of Jesus that is at the heart of the neo-Reformed tradition, including a demonstration of a theodramatic understanding.

The second stanza of the prayer is about living in the power of the gospel. It states,

*I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,*

³² It is interesting to note that Pelagius, a heterodox scholar was Celtic, yet, the larger Celtic Church never embraced his theology and seemed to push him to the continent to work out his theology.

*Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.*³³

Within this prayer, the incarnation, baptism, life, death, and resurrection are not merely an idea, but the reality of all of life. Each aspect of Jesus' person and work is integral to all of life and becomes the strength to live faithfully in a challenging and compromising world. This Christ-centric vision of prayer anchors the quotidian of life within the life of Jesus. This is to have more realization to see the applicability of Christ's solidarity and sacrifice. Only by seeing the extent of God's love through the person and work of Jesus does the strength to live most fully in the challenges of the day emerge. This expression of the Celtic Church anticipated the Reformed distinctive for the gospel to apply to all of life. In many ways, this application of the gospel was in response to the religious understanding of the Druids, which reflected a holistic understanding of spirituality. For example, the Druids were the spiritual leaders of the community, but were also more valued as Tracy Blazer notes,

There is a bit more to be learned about this mysterious and powerful strand of pagan society; Tending to tradition, leading the clan in sacrifice and guiding the communal decisions were the Druids. These mystery figures of the Celts have often be regarded as their priests, but they were more of a combinations of *philosopher, theologian, lawyer, judge, ambassador, scientist, and counselor*. Caesar wrote that these people trained for twenty years or more before being acknowledged as full Druids. They were the "magi," the astrologers of the people, reading the signs of nature and the heavens.³⁴

The Druids were the religious leaders within the communities and spoke on all matters: religious, political, economic, and social. In many ways, the position of the Druids paved

³³ Wallace, *The Celtic Resource Book*, 88.

³⁴ Blazer, *Thin Places*, 45-46.

the way for Christian missionaries, such as St. Aidan and St. Patrick, to be able to show how the gospel would bear witness. This resonates with the idea of sphere sovereignty, and every sphere provides the opportunity to speak in hope of redemption. Ian Bradley notes,

It is quite wrong to identify Celtic Christianity with a world-view which is wholly benign and where there is no room for sin and evil. The many prayers for protection serve as a reminder that there was a very strong sense of the power of sin and of the almost tangible presence of dark and evil forces. Yet there was also a clear understanding that in coming in human form and setting his feet on the earth, Jesus Christ had redeemed the world and made it a changed place. Redemption was seen as an ongoing process rather than a completed and accomplished fact.³⁵

While the Celtic Church did not articulate a nuanced theodramatic way of explaining the biblical story, the idea is reflected in their understanding of Spiritual warfare as exhibited through prayer. While spiritual warfare is not often spoken of in most Western Churches, the Celtic Church believed it was important and vital in everyday life: living the reality and victory of the gospel. This belief was not just ideology, but reflected geographically in how the Celtic Church utilized crosses, often scattered across the lands. Esther De Wall notes the placement of crosses throughout the land is a normal feature for the Celtic Church. She notes, “One thing is clear, however, and that is that these crosses must have stood as a focal point in the countryside, claiming the land for Christ, making a statement of belief in the possibility of a transfigured universe. Everything centers on the crucified Christ at the center of the cross, which is always stark.”³⁶ In addition to ascribing to a

³⁵ Ian Bradley, *Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today's Church* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2008), 68-69.

³⁶ Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (New York: Image, 2009), 148.

Christus Victor theory of the atonement in a cosmological sense, the role of Christ is integral in understanding the healing of shalom. It stands at the center of healing in all aspects of life, including the cosmos. Ray Simpson states,

The Celtic Christians saw Christ as the means of restoring with the created world a communion that had become fragmented. They did not deceive themselves that all was well with the world, or that harmony with it was possible merely “in the natural.” It was only through their communion with Christ.³⁷

The gospel was not merely an act to ransom souls from a defiled world, but to redeem the world and inaugurate a new creation.

Finally, there is a deep understanding of the eschatological role of the church. For the Celts, they viewed their ecclesiological communities as “Colonies of Heaven” within a context of death. They were animated by a strong eschatological vision of heaven intruding into the present. A strong argument can be made that no other expression of the Christian church had such a staggering impact on its culture. During the era of Celtic Christianity (fifth through the tenth Century), the Celtic land was incredibly dangerous. The region was predominately comprised of warring tribes, conflict, and bloodshed. The Celtic Church was able to transform the region from being a pagan, tribal, violent land to being a place that exemplified the principles of the gospel. Warring tribes were unified, justice was administered, education was propagated. Indeed, the Celtic Church established “Colonies of Heaven,” amid a culture of death. Thomas Cahill notes, the Celtic Church was the only expression of Christianity where there were no martyrs.³⁸

³⁷ Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 146.

³⁸ cf. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor, 1996), 152, 171-184.

Similarities with the Neo-Anabaptist Tradition

The Celtic Church does not just reflect the neo-Reformed tradition, it also reflects the elements and practices of the neo-Anabaptist tradition. While the Celtic Church did not follow the model of St. Benedict in abdicating relationship with the broader culture, it followed the community that influenced St. Benedict, namely the Desert Hermits. Following these Hermits, the Celts embraced a robust, and separated, spirituality.

Michael Mitton notes,

The Celtic Church found such people [Anthony, Paul of Thebes, and other dessert hermits] a great inspiration and, although the climate of northern Europe was very different from the hot deserts of Egypt, the principles of desert spirituality could be applied.³⁹

Following the example of their desert brothers and sisters, the Celtic Churches were committed to the practice of solitude, prayer, and scripture reading. They often chose the locations for their monasteries based on places that could help in their practices, as seen in their choosing of islands such as Iona or Lindisfarne, which became the centers for Celtic spirituality and mission. The monk's spiritual practices were not an esoteric, gnostic exercise to pull them out of the world, but a Christ-centered approach that allowed them to live faithfully within the world. The Celtic Church understood that prayer was deeply woven throughout life. Esther De Wall notes,

The Celtic way of prayer was learned from the monasteries; it was from its religious communities that the people learned to pray. As a result, they learned

³⁹ Michael Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord* (Abingdon: BRF, 2010), 26.

that there was no separation of praying and living; praying and working flow into each other, so that life is to be punctuated by prayer, becomes prayer.⁴⁰

This idea reinforces the themes of monastic living put forward by Brother Lawrence in the middle ages. There is no antithesis between living faithfully and being spiritually robust. Rather, living well is to be established by attending to the spiritual. In maintaining this distinction, the Celtic Church was not unreflectively assimilated into the power structures of the culture, but separated and engaged as a counter-community as demonstrated in the neo-Anabaptist tradition.

Within the life of the Celtic Church there was a priority placed on hospitality. The church understood that personal piety is not a higher practice than hospitality, but rather hospitality is the fullest expression of personal piety and missiology. Therefore, the Celtic monks would drop whatever task they were doing if there was an opportunity to host.⁴¹ As Ray Simpson notes, the Celtic Church understood that “Hospitality is not only a custom in a home, but a key into the Kingdom of God.”⁴²

The Celts understood the art of hospitality is one of the essential ways the church can love their community. Through the act of hospitality, the church sacrificially provides for others and provides the experience of love regardless of their race, gender, orientation, and religion. This conviction was the most structured program of the Celtic church because it reflected the heart behind the gospel. In particular, the emphasis on

⁴⁰ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, Kindle Loc. 56.

⁴¹ Cf. Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 129.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 113.

mass and communion anticipated the practices later found within the neo-Anabaptist tradition. Echoing Yoder above, Simpson notes,

The primary symbol of hospitality is the invitation to all who are hungry to feed on the Living Bread at the Lord's Table. It is a tragedy that this sacrament has for many becomes a sign of exclusion, though thankfully many reformed churches keep an "Open Table." This table is open to the rich or poor, black or white, there are no entrance fees, it has been described as one beggar telling another beggar where they can find food.⁴³

The power of hospitality is demonstrated in the amount of people the Celtic Church would serve, sometimes as many as 1,000 people per day, and St. Brigit would ensure there was a generous supply of bread and butter for the guests she would receive. In many ways, the Celtic Church was a place of hospitality and dignity. The emphasis of hospitality reflects the commitment of the neo-Anabaptist movement to not only shape a community through her practices, but welcoming others into that community and practice to reflect the gospel.

Woven Strands for Incarnational Missiology

The Celtic Church blended the strengths of what would be highlighted in both the neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist movements, but expressed these emphases through a gospel-centered, incarnational missiology. This is clearly seen in the ministries of St. Patrick and St. Aidan. Christopher Bamford notes St. Patrick's ministry success is due to how he embraced this common ground. He states, "His [Patrick's] success in this seems to have resided in his willingness to accept the indigenous traditions and conform his

⁴³ Ibid., 116.

teaching to them. This respect and conformity in receiving wisdom was then reciprocated.”⁴⁴

Aidan revolutionized the idea of clergy by resisting the prominent place of clergy within Roman society, thereby using the role as an opportunity to identify with the poor, the marginalized, and the outcasts while remaining conversant with nobles. Monks never carried weapons, despite the highly dangerous country. Monks also never used horses for transportation, despite being offered horses. The Celtic clergy would walk everywhere. This conviction established a posture of humility in the region as they viewed themselves as guests and pilgrims. Therefore, rather than being keen on addressing, preaching, and lecturing, they were first ardent listeners. Their calm demeanor would allow them to have many interactions and share the gospels. They would seek to model a colony of heaven while on the earth, embodying the values they were proclaiming. In this way, Aidan broke from the ministry practices of his predecessors. Ray Simpson notes,

Aidan came, like previous missionaries, with a message, but unlike them he also modeled the message. He did this in two ways: first, by living a way of life that reflected gospel values, and second, by creating little ‘colonies of heaven’ that modeled something of the kingdom of God on earth. He did not rush out where angels fear to tread. He built up a relationship of trust with his sponsor, King Oswald, and with Oswald’s staff and warriors. He had learned some English from the royal refugees at Dunad, but, until he was fluent, Oswald, with great humility, translated as Aidan shared the gospel at the court.⁴⁵

This method of slow, deliberate mission work provided a strong foundation wherein the gospel was able to flourish because it connected with the community at a deeper level.

⁴⁴ Bamford and Marsh, *Celtic Christianity*, 19.

⁴⁵ Ray Simpson, *St Aidan’s Way of Mission: Celtic Insights for a Post-Christian World* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2016), Kindle loc. 116.

They were cherished by the laymen and respected by the nobles while maintaining their distinction from either. In many ways, St. Aidan modeled the gospel in a profound way that is articulated in a neo-Reformed tradition and practiced in a neo-Anabaptist tradition.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 4

MISSION AND VISION OF THE TRAINING MANUAL

The purpose of the church planting manual is to craft a theologically grounded, gospel-centered, and culturally-sensitive guide to equip planters for planting in the unique context of the Northwest. The manual incorporates the cultural analysis of chapter one, the insights from the literature surveyed in chapter two, and the theological contributions of chapter three. These components help the planter in developing a church plant rooted in a historical expression that can supplement their theological tradition. The manual is organized tri-perspectivally, and its purpose is to aid the planter as they discern the normative, situational, and existential aspects of planting.

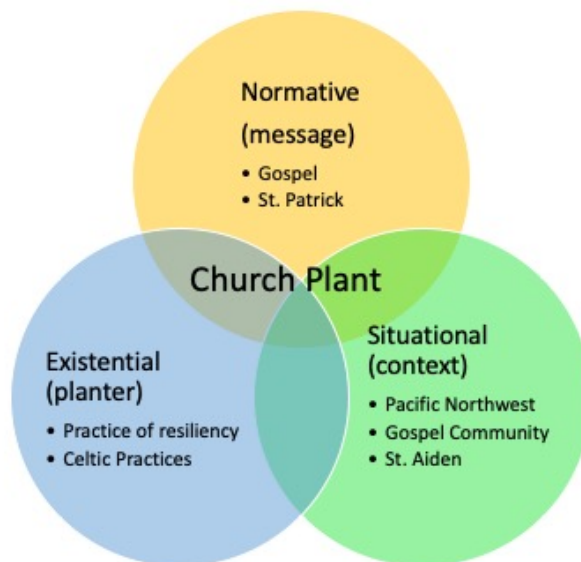
Tri-Perspectivalism

There is a correspondence within knowledge that makes it conversational and inter-relational. As noted above,

Human knowledge can be understood in three ways: as knowledge of God’s norm [e.g. the “Bible”]; as knowledge of the situation [context]; and knowledge of ourselves [existential]. None can be achieved adequately *without* the others. Each

includes the others. Each, therefore, is a ‘perspective on the whole of human knowledge.’¹

Each element of knowledge becomes a foundation for the church planting manual, and each element of knowledge can be represented as three concentric circles. The Normative would include the biblical-theological basis for planting, which is the gospel. The Situational constitutes the environment the planter lives and is trying to establish. This includes the geographical (Pacific Northwest), the ideological, and the cultural climate (secular and post-modern), but it also includes the type of church community needed to reach these areas. The Existential relates to the planters themselves, focusing on practices for resilience. The tri-perspectival understanding could be represented as three concentric circles with their church plant, this is represented in the convergence of the three circles as demonstrated below.



¹ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 74.

Following the format of Redeemer's *Church Planting Manual*, the manual consists of three main sections that correspond to each perspective. Around each organized principle, the content of the manual will be informed by the life of the Celtic Church.

Normative Perspective

The manual begins with the gospel, just as the Celtic Church began with the gospel, and where church planting begins as well. The gospel is the starting point because it involves the analysis, solution, and hope for both the existential (the planter) and the situational (the context) perspective. By starting with the gospel as a comprehensive solution to the extensive problem of sin, the manual situates the planter in an expanded gospel-perspective to apply the good news to themselves as well as to the context around them including church, community, and culture. The Celtic Church's perspective of the gospel is most clearly seen in the remarkable story of St. Patrick. The life of St. Patrick is a powerful story showing the normative power of the gospel and the implications of the gospel situationally and existentially. Patrick's life shows the transformative power of the gospel in his own life, as he was neither a Christian, but a slave, and upon being liberated, was converted and likewise was driven to convert those who had enslaved him. St. Patrick's life shows a robust passion for the gospel that he experienced personally, embodied missionally, and extended ecclesiology. After presenting the gospel, the manual considers the situational perspective and the type of gospel-shaped community that can reach a unique region like the Pacific Northwest.

Situational Perspective

Understanding context is imperative for effective ministry. All gospel knowledge is contextual. The manual will describe the Pacific Northwest, utilizing the insights of the first chapter in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities of planting. A description of the nations that comprise the Northwest as well as the secular presence of the Northwest will help the planter think more missionally about their context and how their church can reach the unique context for the kingdom through the formation of a counter-cultural community. This chapter will begin by the story of St. Aidan and his story of mission to the lands of Northumbria.

The overlap between the normative and situational perspective on the Venn diagram could best be understood as missiology. This is where gospel and gospel-community are embodied contextual for the care of culture.² The Celtic Church embraced this missional posture by presenting the gospel as the native hope for the culture, and not an imposition of a foreign culture (e.g. the first Celtic missions as Roman Cultural expression). The manual presents a philosophy of ministry that is reflective of the Celts and influenced by missiologist, Leslie Newbigin, mentioned in chapters two. St. Aidan's life was missional and provides an example of how the modern church can live missionally in a confusing age.³

² I am indebted to the insights of Makoto Fujimura for understanding the about cultural engagement which connotes conflict and hostility, whereas culture care is more reflective of the gospel and how Christ cares for us. Cf. Makoto Fujimura et. al., *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* (Downers Grove: IVP Books), 2017.

³ Cf. Simpson and Lyons-Lee, *St Aidan's Way of Mission*, Kindle Loc. 150ff.

In addition to describing the Northwest, the manual contains a section on cultural exegesis. Understanding culture is an important exercise when preparing to plant. However, many church planting manuals and books will discuss the generic cultural narratives of our cultural milieu, but they do not give concrete practices to help the planter discern the specific cultural narrative of their own community. By understanding the cultural narrative and story of their community, the planter can be more effective in their role of showing how the gospel story provides the fuller answer of the gospel.

Existential Perspective

The planter is the most important aspect of the planting of a successful church, and the care of the planter is often overlooked and neglected. The manual will encourage resiliency in the planters (and their marriages) to cultivate a strong emotional quotient (EQ) that will be able to endure the challenges of planting. This will be done through introducing the five categories from *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*⁴ and synthesizing them with the categories of Rebekah Lyon's *Rhythms of Renewal*.⁵ The five categories from *Resilient Ministry* are: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership development. The four quadrants from *Rhythms of Renewal* are rest, restore, connect, and create. These ideas are integrated and illustrated throughout the practices of the Celtic Church.

⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: IVP Books), 2013.

⁵ Rebekah Lyons, *Rhythms of Renewal, Trading Stress and Anxiety for a Life of Peace and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

Context of the Manual

The manual is adaptable to be employed in two contexts and for three different audiences. The first way the manual may be used is as a curriculum. This curriculum may be utilized by a planter, a core group of a church plant, or a church seeking revitalization for more fruitful ministry in the Pacific Northwest. In each one of these cases, the manual stands alone to officiate a conversation with those interacting with it. The second context the manual may be employed is through a training intensive. Within this training context, the material can be expanded upon through interaction and conversation. In this way, the content is more dynamic than the curriculum.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING THE TRAINING MANUAL

The manual can be implemented in a variety of context to various audience, as noted in chapter four. This includes training active and potential planters, leading church plant core groups, and leading churches seeking revitalization. It can also be used to gain further understanding of how the Celtic Church can influence and inform philosophy of ministry.

The first group consists of the church planters themselves including those whom are investigating whether they are called to plant or current planters in the field. In this audience, the manual serves as a catalyst for deeper theological reflection, cultural engagement, and personal contemplation. While it is outside the scope of the manual to be a comprehensive study on church planting or the Celtic Church, it will focus on expanding the planter's toolbox theologically, contextually, and personally.

For planters to implement the manual, several strategies are listed. First, in partnership with the Northwest Church Planting Network of the Pacific Northwest Presbytery, there will be various trips to local and denominational seminaries to introduce the network and to recruit church planters. These local seminaries include Western

Seminary (Portland, OR), Portland Seminary (Portland, OR), Corban University (Salem, OR), and Northwest Christian University (Eugene, OR). In addition to these local seminaries, the session at Christ Central Presbyterian Church has expressed interest in connecting with denominational and Reformed seminaries: Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, MO), Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC and Orlando, FL), and Westminster Theological Seminary (Glenside, PA). As there are only seven active PCA churches in Oregon, the ideal goal would be to recruit three planters within the next five years.

The second approach to implement the manual for the planter is through partnership with local PCA churches (City Church, Oaks Parish, Ascension, Evergreen, and Hope). Within these congregations, there are emerging leaders who could serve as planters or church planting residents. In this way, through collaboration and relationships with these churches, the manual will aid in developing and equipping future planters.

Another approach is to make the manual available for core groups. While this is a more unique church planting situation, core groups can emerge and seek a planter. This happens when there is either a church split, a church closes, or a group forms and desires to see a new expression of church in their community. The Northwest Church Planting network receives requests from core groups for a planter, and it currently does not have anything to offer these groups. The church planting manual can guide groups to create a collective vision for forming a gospel-centric community. Currently there are two core groups (Medford, OR and Bend, OR) who are exploring a partnership with the PCA.

The final approach is to make this material available to churches who are plateauing or declining and are interested in revitalization for their churches and

ministries. While most of the formal relationships are within the PCA, the manual's presentation and tone are more universal than reflective of the theology and methodology of the PCA. The manual's focus on the Celtic Church's approach could inform more faithful and fruitful ministry amidst the challenges and opportunities of the Northwest. Within situations like these, the manual can serve to introduce churches to a new philosophy of ministry.

In addition to deploying the manual in these contexts, there will be several opportunities to use the manual for an intensive training event. This has been field-tested and presented at the Oregon Cohort,¹ a cross-denominational, missional extension of Redeemer City-to-City, The Center for Pastoral flourishing at Western Seminary, and the Northwest Church Planting Network. Ministers who have attended this presentation have expressed interest in experiencing an extended version and suggested additional contexts to explore the material further.

Evaluating the Manual

There are several approaches to assess the value of the training manual and intensive. First, an initial intake registration is required to register for the manual and/or the intensive. This registration will provide a baseline statistic of the planter, core group, or church who is participating. Registrants will report information indicating who is utilizing the material (e.g. planter, core group, church, staff, etc.) and describing the size

¹ This occurred on May 7, 2019 at Western Seminary.

of their church, the numbers of recent baptisms, conversions, and missional conversations.

Second, at the end of the manual there will be a URL linked to an anonymous survey (hosted by googledocs), where participants may be able evaluate and comment on the manual. Here they can provide feedback on what was helpful or unhelpful and clear or unclear. The results to this survey will provide insight into how the manual can be edited or expanded.

After the groups have finished the material, they will be sent another survey six months and twelve months afterwards. This survey will include similar questions regarding any changes to the size of their core group, size of their church, recent baptisms, conversions, and missional interactions. These statistics will be compared and analyzed with the numbers reported in the registration, thereby looking at trends of growth or effectiveness. The second part of the survey will ask if the material has changed any ministry paradigms, programs, or philosophies in the planter, core group, or church.

For those who participate in the intensive trainings there are two occasions for feedback and evaluation. The first will be conducted during the intensive. Throughout this training, the presenter indicates ideas resonating with the audience or stimulating conversations, and, likewise, concepts that are not pertinent to the conversation. The second occasion for feedback is at the conclusion of the training, when a QR code will be given to each participant. The QR code will direct the participant to an anonymous online survey (hosted by googledocs). These questions will evaluate the training material, the format of the intensive, the content of the training, and its strengths and weaknesses.

The material will be updated by incorporating the insights and feedback from the surveys. In this way, like the church, the material will seek to change with the culture and opportunities.

Evaluating Success of the Program

Success can be evaluated in three distinct ways. First, the ideas behind the curriculum will have been successful in the formation, gathering, and expansion of Christ Central Presbyterian Church in Corvallis, OR. Through incorporating the insights of the Celtic church and embodying the strengths of the neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist traditions, Christ Central has been successful in gathering a core group, equipping elders, and embodying a creative and faithful presence in Corvallis. The success of Christ Central is inviting others into the possibility of a new method of ministry in the Pacific Northwest. Second, initiating more conversations concerning planting new churches, raising church planters, and revitalizing churches is inherently a success. Creating a manual and intensive serve as a catalyst for further conversations on kingdom expansion through church planting and revitalization.

Finally, the third evaluation of success will be determined in future years. As a paradigm, this material may be helpful in the establishment of new churches, equipping new planters, and helping existing churches. However, these metrics will not be available for years, and the material will be considered a success if it can aid in the establishment of two or three new churches within the next three to five years.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Canoes were intended to be the primary vehicle of discovering the Northwest for Lewis and Clark; however, they proved to be ineffective in the nonexistence of a Northwest Passage waterway. The most helpful aid in the discovery of the Northwest was not a vehicle, but a person, Sacajawea. Tod Bolsinger notes, “Without her guidance, without her people providing horses, and without the presence of an older Shoshone man (Old Toby) leading through an obscure trail through the mountains, the Corp of Discovery would have died in the mountains.”¹ She was a guide who was conversant with the discoverers, understood the history of the land, and navigated the challenges of the Pacific Northwest.

In a similar way, as the church is entering a new missionary age, marked by globalism and secularism, Christian leaders are discoverers. They are imagining what the church will be and look like in the twenty-first century. For the first time in world history, the emerging and dominant religious preference people declare is “none”, and this new ideological landscape is manifesting both within progressive cultures (e.g. Left Coast) and conservative cultures (e.g. Far West). While the manifestations and expressions of these cultures are different, they are both rooted within the same ideological goal, “kingdom without the King.”² Within this new context, churches, denominations, and

¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 98.

² Mark Sayers, *This Cultural Moment Podcast*, episode one, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/this-cultural-moment/id1342868490?i=1000401174288>.

planters are learning how to embody the kingdom through faithful presence. Rather than utilizing a program or relying on modernist models that have proved to be unsuccessful in recent decades, the most helpful aid for the church may be through a people from the past, namely the Celtic Church.

The Celtic Church encountered a new frontier with many challenges, and it learned how to creatively adapt to their context while remaining historically and traditionally orthodox. There are many similarities between Britannia during the age of the Celtic Church and the modern-day Pacific Northwest. This includes the spiritual sensitivity of the population, appreciation for nature, and repulsion for the previous expressions of Christendom. Yet, rather than dismissing these attributes of the culture or the connection to the broader church, the Celtic Church demonstrated how the gospel informs thoughtful engagement. The historic examples from the Celts can guide the current church in navigating the challenges of engaging culture, while simultaneously building a counter-cultural community and remaining historically orthodox.

The Celtic Church provides a synthesis where there is a common dichotomy within Protestantism, primarily within the neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist tradition. The Celtic church anticipated and practiced the strengths of both traditions and understood the most effective way to engage culture and redeem culture (values of the neo-Reformed church) was to develop robust communities of faith (values of neo-Anabaptist church). Using modern categories, the ancient Celtic Church meet the challenge of their new missionary age by engaging as Kuyperians and by living as Yoderians. By presenting the model of the Celtic church, the manual encourages and empowers planters to seek new expressions of church. The manual encourages

conversations on discovering how the church will grow into and through this new missionary age.

Additionally, one of the greatest myths of the recent church planting movement is the extrabiblical qualifications of planters. This includes requiring entrepreneurship and CEO-styled leadership in the assessments of church planters. If determination is the number one criterion for effective church planting,³ the Celtic model provides a biblically-grounded model to cultivate calling, grit, and conviction in planters who may not meet the modern metrics for planting, but nonetheless are called to plant. By embracing the simpler model of Celtic ministry, the disciplines of the Celtic Church can provide a sustainable rhythm that will develop spiritual and emotional health within the planter, especially through the spiritual disciplines that reflect the values and influence of the desert hermits. This manual can encourage a new wave of planters and churches.

The expedition of Lewis and Clark was the first step in an era of discovery to open the Pacific Northwest to pioneers, expansion, and cities. Their journey was difficult, and while the excursion was unsuccessful in discovering a Northwest Passage, it was successful in discovering the land, people, and geography of the Northwest. This discovery made western expansion possible. Similarly, this paper, manual, and project may not discover the “Northwest Passage” of church planting, but it is a proposal that cultivates a conversation on rediscovering a paradigm of ministry in a similar context. Through considering the posture of the Celts, the church may gain deeper understanding of this new age and re-open a land for kingdom expansion.

³ Bergquist and Crane, *City Shaped Churches*, Kindle Loc. 500.

APPENDIX A: TRAINING MANUAL

Considering the Celtic Way

BY GREG JOINES



**Gospel and Community
through the Celtic Mission**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This manual is the fruit of years of education and ministry. It is both an expression and culmination of my doctoral studies and ministry experience. Studying under Richard Mouw and David Fitch exposed me to the beauty and the depth of the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions. John and Olive Drane helped me synthesize these traditions as expressed through the lens of the Celtic Church. The posture of the Celtic Church has guided me in the formation of Christ Central Presbyterian Church. I am thankful to the faculty and administration at Fuller Theological Seminary who have encouraged me throughout this process, especially Kurt Fredrickson and Cindy Lee. Dr. Tim Morey has been a wonderful content reader, and I am thankful for his insights. Pat Roach encouraged me to cultivate a culturally sensitive, yet contextual, philosophy of ministry. Pat, I still blame you for all of this. The officers of Christ Central (Andrew Sweeny, Shawn Schumacher, JJ and Janine Arthur, and Bjorn and Jenny Bulthuis) have been incredibly supportive throughout this entire process, and I am thankful to journey alongside them. Finally, this is only possible because of the amazing love of and support of my family. Dolly, no amount of words could accurately convey my love or gratitude for you. Josie, Belle, and Greyson, you have taught me so much about love, I hope I can reciprocate it back to you.

Graphic design by Abide Web Design (<https://abidewebdesign.com/>)





A Brief Introduction

Over the past 30 years, there has been renewed interest in church planting. Many denominations, networks, and individuals have labored to plant churches. This interest in planting has been a response to the statistic that 80-85% of churches in America are either in a stage of “plateau or decline,” (Aubrey Malphurs, <https://malphursgroup.com/state-of-the-american-church-plateaued-declining/>). This decline is not only institutional, but reflective of the overall decline amongst religious adherence in the United States and Canada. While the percentage of religious affiliation is declining, there is also an increase in those who identify as not-religious or “nones” (Pew Research, <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/religiously-unaffiliated/>).

While Europe has been experiencing this reality since the end of World War II, these challenges for the church in America and Canada have emerged over the past several decades. Collectively, the global church is entering a new missionary age. This missionary age is marked by the challenges of post-modernity, secularism, and relativism. Many of the programs, methods, and models that emerged in the “church growth” era (1970s-1990s) are now ineffective and obsolete. But rather than despair, this cultural moment is an opportunity for the church and the kingdom.

Why Plant Churches?

Tim Keller notes,

*The continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in a city and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, parachurch ministries, growing megachurches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting (Keller, *Why Plant Churches*, 1).*

According to Ed Stetzer, “church planting is essential to advance the Great Commission” (Stetzer, *State of New Churches*, 7).

Planting churches is not only the biblical means to carry out the Great Commission, but also the most strategic way to fulfill this calling. However, in order to plant sustainable, reproducible churches that can thrive within this missionary age, planters will require innovation, creativity, and insight from the past.

Relics of Empire

Outside the city of Carlisle, England is a wall. The crumbling wall is far from impressive; it can't prevent people from getting in, nor livestock from getting out. It is an old wall and reflects another age: The Roman Empire. The wall was ordered to be constructed by the Emperor Hadrian in 122 AD to mark the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The land inside the wall was the *Pax Romana*, and north of this wall was the land of the Celts: the barbarous, violent, Druid tribes living in the rest of Britannia. The land consisted of modern-day England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland). This frontier represented a new missionary age for the Christian Church in the wake of the Roman Empire.

It is well-known that the church grew alongside the Roman Empire, often through the Christian soldiers or throughout missions that utilized the infrastructure of the Roman Empire. The church expanded through Britannia by following the patterns and models that worked in other areas of the empire: planting churches in urban centers, conducting services in Latin, clerical vestments of other regions. The churches within Britannia during the Roman Empire, like Hadrian's Wall, collapsed with the decline of the Roman Empire.

For the church to reach Britannia again, she needed a new model. She needed a model that could be conversant with the region, sensitive to the culture, and faithful to the gospel and tradition.

In many ways the Pacific Northwest reflects this narrative. In our post-Christian age, we see relics of the empire of Christendom, and likewise, the decline of the churches within this

region who continue to use the same obsolete practices. But, like the Celtic church, we find ourselves confronted with an opportunity for a new expression of the church, one that is present within our cultural context and faithful to the witness of Jesus.

Considering the Celts

The Celtic church was faithful and fruitful. St. Patrick is known to have planted over 350 churches in Ireland. St. Aidan and Columba transformed the lands of Northumbria and Scotland by establishing monasteries, abbeys, and churches. The Celtic Church thrived in the land from its first missionaries (5th century) until Viking raiders in the 10th Century.

There is much the modern church can learn by considering the brothers and sisters in the Celtic Church. They embodied a *fixed* theology (holding to historic Patristic faith), but also demonstrated a missional, *flexible* methodology (in a proto-missional expression). The expression and methodology of the Celtic Church was innovative and unique. This was borne out of missiological necessity and ecclesiological freedom. This is because the Council of Ephesus (431) passed a canon that prevented foreign bishops from interfering in foreign missions. This allowed the Celtic Church a certain degree of ministerial freedom. Although connected to a broader tradition, they were able to embody a native expression of the church. In many ways, the modern church needs to reclaim this historic missional posture and creativity.

The Overview of The Celtic Church

The Celtic Church was a movement in contradistinction to the current expression of church and other emerging movements. In contrast to the model of Christendom within the Roman Empire, the Celtic church was simpler and more faithful. But in contrast to other emerging movements such as St. Benedict, which sought withdrawal and piety, the Celtic Church was more engaged with the broader community. They navigated this tension by embracing the piety of the desert Hermits, a rule of life like St. Benedict, with a missional posture. The movement began with the missionary work of St. Patrick, St Aidan, Cuthbert, and Columbanus, and it continued for several millennia. The Celtic land, Britannia, was one of the most vicious, lawless, and pagan lands before the arrival of the church. However, the presence of the Celtic Church transformed the land. The most staggering statistic is that within this dangerous, hostile environment, there was never a Celtic Martyr until the Viking invaders (Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, 152).

Synthesis of Two Traditions

Most of my doctoral work has centered around the concept of ‘Gospel and Culture’ and *how* the church connects with, cares for, and engages the broader culture. The two classic schools of thought within evangelical Protestantism is the neo-Reformed and neo-Anabaptist tradition.

The neo-Reformed church connects to the influence of Abraham Kuyper and is expressed through Dutch neo-Calvinism. Within the various models of “Christ and Culture” by Niebuhr, this tradition represents the “transforming culture” model. In contrast to this model, the neo-Anabaptist model seeks to transform culture by not embracing or participating within the broken systems of power within the world, but by creating a counter-cultural community that reflects the hope of the gospel. Most view these traditions in conflict with each other. However, the Celtic Church anticipated the strengths of both traditions. The Celtic Church was an effective experiment in changing and redeeming the cultural landscape of its context (thereby fulfilling a neo-Reformed vision), but this mode of change was the result of focusing on developing and cultivating gospel-centered communities (practicing neo-Anabaptist rhythms). Within the Celtic Church, both ideals were possible and not in tension. Similarly, churches today may embrace the strengths of both movements as fidelity to biblical convictions and a robust heritage of the historic church. These convictions will lead to a stronger expression and embodiment of the gospel to the Pacific Northwest.

Another Voice in the Conversation

This manual is not a comprehensive treatise on church planting, nor is it an extensive study on the Celtic Church. It is another voice to aid to in the conversation and a supplement to the resources already available to planters. This manual is to introduce a tradition that will supplement current literature. There are many resources that can assist in the early stages of preparing, gathering, and launching a church. This is an addendum and guide to navigate this new missionary age in the region by considering historical church movements. In presenting these ideas, this manual considers the **what** (gospel), the **where** (context, mission, community), and the **who** (cultivating resilient, emotional healthy ministers).





St. Patrick and the Comprehensive Gospel

The historic St. Patrick is more impressive than the modern caricature of him. Patrick was not Irish, he never banished snakes, and he never used a three-leaf clover to teach the Trinity. Patrick, however, was animated by a strong conviction of the gospel. He was likely from modern-day Wales or England, he was captured by pirates, and he was not a Christ-follower. In his *Confession* he states, “I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others.”

Patrick states,

After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realize now, the spirit was burning in me at that time. It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: “You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country.” Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: “Look – your ship is ready.” It was not nearby, but a good two hundred miles away. I had never been to the place, nor did I know anyone there. So I ran away then, and left the man with whom I had been for

six years. It was in the strength of God that I went – God who turned the direction of my life to good; I feared nothing while I was on the journey to that ship.

After his escape from Ireland and slavery, Patrick decided to return to Ireland.

The life of St. Patrick illustrates the comprehensive gospel. It was a gospel Patrick experienced personally, embodied missionally, and extended creatively. The gospel was broader than personal salvation, as it led him to return to the land and people who hurt him. The gospel challenged him to seek relational healing, but also cultural transformation.

It is told that on Easter eve it was common for the Druids to extinguish all the flames, and yet St. Patrick kindled a fire. The Druids saw it and warned King Laoghaire the fire must be put out, or it would be a fire that would overtake all of Ireland and would never be put out. Eventually that fire spread throughout all the Celtic lands. The Catholic church did not denounce slavery until the end of the nineteenth century, but St. Patrick was one of the first Saints to oppose its evils. When St. Patrick died on March 17, 461, Ireland abolish slavery and never reinstituted it.

The story of St. Patrick demonstrates that when the gospel is proclaimed fully, it will set a land ablaze and bring revival and transformation. Our world needs the fire of the gospel, but what is the gospel?

World Made Good

Throughout the creation account, there is the benedictive refrain, “it was good,” culminating with the great benediction that “it was *very* good.” Within the garden, there was closeness between humanity and God, intimacy with man and woman, and partnership between creation and humanity. These relationships led to a mutual flourishing and an inter-related flourishing, known as *shalom*.

“Shalom is a vision of order and harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, and well-being. For the Christian, this was God’s intention in creation and it is his promise for the new heaven and new earth. In this light, the entire biblical narrative centers around the shalom God intended and that he will, one day, restore.” (Hunter, *To Change the World*, 228).

However, sin unraveled shalom.

The Extensive Problem of Sin

Sin is more than prohibited actions committed; it is also the overall condition of our world. As illustrated by the account of the Fall, sin ruptures shalom. It separates God and humanity, and Adam and Eve only felt safe when they were hiding from God (Gen. 3.8). It destroyed the intimacy between the man and woman, and they felt separated unless they hid through a

covering, in their case, fig leaves (Gen. 3.7). Not only are these relationships characterized by shame, but also by fear and brokenness. Now the land itself is even cursed (Gen. 3.17-18).

The problem and consequence of sin touches upon every aspect of life. We feel it personally in the shame and guilt we bear. We feel it relationally in our marriages, families, and communities. We feel the frustration in our work and pursuits. We see the brokenness in our culture and politics. We are wounded by the problem of sin in the world, but we also oscillate and wield sin to hurt others, ourselves, and this world. We need the power of the gospel.

Solution of the Gospel

One of the hallmarks of evangelicalism is the emphasis on soul salvation (or plan of salvation). However, the biblical picture of salvation and the gospel is greater than merely saving souls.

Scot McKnight states, “The gospel Story of Jesus Christ is a story about Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as Lord, Jesus as Savior, and Jesus as Son. It is sometimes forgotten that ‘Christ’ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The word Messiah means ‘anointed King’ and ‘Lord’ and ‘Ruler.’ Lord means, well, ‘Lord,’ and the word Son here certainly means the anointed king of Israel, as in Psalm 2. So, the emphasis here in the gospel is that Jesus is Lord over all” (McKnight, *King Jesus Gospel*, 55).

As Lord, Jesus gives us the promise that he is “making all things new” (Rev. 21.9). This comprehensive picture of the gospel is personal, relational, social, cultural, political, vocational, and ecological. The implications of the gospel are great! Following Patrick, we can see the gospel is a *comprehensive* solution to the *extensive* problem of sin. As demonstrated in Patrick’s life, the gospel was a personal reality (Patrick was saved personally in meeting God while tending the flocks), it challenged the social structures (Patrick helped abolish slavery and establish women’s rights), and it established a new community that transformed the nation (the churches he established throughout Ireland).

Why We Need a Bigger Gospel

Unfortunately, the modern church is providing answers the broader culture is not asking. When the gospel is reduced to only the personal applications, which is a part, but not the whole of the gospel, we neuter the power of the gospel. Most of Gen Z (emerging adults, 0-24 years old) are concerned about ecological conservation, global warming, and issues of social justice (Barna, <https://www.barna.com/research/gen-z-questions-answered/>). They also believe the church is silent or irrelevant on these issues. Biblically, these matters are related to the gospel, but the church has viewed them as peripheral or distortive to the gospel. Like Patrick, we need a comprehensive gospel to meet the big needs of this generation and region. Churches need to, like Patrick, recognize and experience the depth and breadth of the gospel.

Encouragement

Patrick was personally transformed by the power of the gospel before he could see that power transform a land. This is instructive for any minister and planter. The power of the gospel is not merely the beginning of the journey of the Christian life, but its power will animate and motivate the entire journey, especially in ministry. The gospel is not something to outgrow, but it is the means of growth. Only a joyful understanding of the gospel will sustain the planter for all the challenges of ministry.

Additional Resources

Gospel

King Jesus Gospel by Scot McKnight

Prodigal God by Tim Keller

Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning

St. Patrick

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill

Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter

St. Patrick of Ireland by Philip Freeman





St. Aidan and a Gospel-Centered Community



Failure may sometimes precede success. Such was the case with St. Aidan. Before St. Aidan's mission to Northumbria, there were two previous attempts to reach the region. The monks who attempted were named Cormac and Paulinus. Their model of mission reflected the posture of the Roman Empire. It was a model of "colonization." They expected the ordinary peasants and royalty to adopt their language, their customs, their practices, and, thus, their religion. There was nothing compelling in this message to the people of Northumbria, so they disregarded it. Upon returning to Iona (Northwest Scotland), they blamed the failure of the mission on the people, who they interpreted as "stupid, ignorant, and stubborn." Aidan suggested to Cormac, "I think you were too harsh with those people. It is better not to lay on them our own rules and ways of doing things. Just gently give them the milk of God's word" (Simpson, *St Aidan's Way of Mission*, loc. 177). The suggestion was so insightful, Aidan was appointed and sent to the land of Northumbria.

The church historian Bede records that Aidan was appointed bishop of the Isle of Lindisfarne (Holy Island), which is accessible twice a day when the tide is out. Nestled off the coast, the Island was both open and accessible, yet also protected and distinct. Aidan sought to establish a monastery that resembled a "Colony of Heaven" upon earth. Upon arrival to the island, Aidan and 12 monks spent forty days praying and fasting (only having an egg and a piece of bread in the evening). Aidan's goal was to live in a way that reflected their gospel convictions. Out of all the monasteries that were founded during the time of the Celtic church, Lindisfarne was the only monastery founded *for* the purpose of mission.

Aidan's missional posture was different from his predecessors and allowed him to be successful. Historian Ray Simpson notes, "Aidan came, like the two previous missionaries, with a message, but unlike them he also modeled the message. He did this in two ways: first, by living a way of life that reflected gospel values, and second, by creating little 'colonies of heaven' that modelled something of the kingdom of God on earth" (Simpson, *St. Aidan's Way of Mission*, loc. 180).

Together with Iona, Lindisfarne, also known as Holy Island, became the cradle of Celtic Christianity from which it was able to extend throughout the entire country. Aidan's missional conviction was synonymous with community formation; as the church exists for mission. In a similar way, considering the posture of Aidan provides a pattern to reach the Northwest.

The Pacific Northwest

In addition to the global challenges outlined in the introduction, there are contextual challenges to planting in the Pacific Northwest. This region is often blanketed as synecdoche of the show, *Portlandia*. However, there is more complexity to the region than hipsters and craft beer. Within the Northwest, smaller cities (e.g. Corvallis, OR) reflect the secular urban ideologies of urban cities (e.g. Portland and Seattle), while some larger cities (e.g. Spokane, WA) reflect rural ideologies. This is usually interpreted as an "urban" and "rural" distinction. This distinction would be an oversimplification.

This division is not just of ideological, cultural, or geographical identities, but something greater. The Northwest region is comprised of two distinct geographies, or nations. Colin Woodard, in his book *American Nations*, shows that these differences are not merely reflection of population density, urbanization, or globalization, but rather a reflection of the eleven different "nations" that comprise of America.



SOURCE: COLIN WOODARD, AMERICAN NATIONS: A HISTORY OF THE ELEVEN RIVAL REGIONAL CULTURES OF NORTH AMERICA (VIKING PRESS, 2011). ©COLIN WOODARD.

The Left Coast

After the initial discovery of the region by Lewis and Clark, the Northwest was settled in a way that has forever shaped its cultural milieu. The Left Coast is the region between the “Pacific Ocean and the Cascade and Coast mountain ranges ... it stretches from Monterey, California to Juneau, Alaska including four decidedly progressive metropolises: San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver.”

This region was established by two groups: New Englanders (comprised of merchants, missionaries, and woodsmen) and Greater Appalachians (consisting of farmers, prospectors, and fur traders). These two groups have shaped the ideologies of the Left Coast by combining the “Yankee faith in good government and social reform with a commitment to individual self-exploration and discovery.” This is reflected in the innovative, informational technologies and commitment to social and environmental reforms, and progressive values and politics. This attitude of the Far West is exemplified in the urban centers of the Northwest (e.g. Seattle, Portland, Vancouver) and in smaller towns within the Left Coast.

The Far West

Whereas the Left Coast is mostly shaped by those who settled it, the culture of the Far West is influenced more by its geography and climate. Woodard notes,

Environmental factors truly trumped ethnic ones. High, dry, and remote, the interior west presented conditions so severe that they effectively destroyed those who tried to apply the farming and lifestyle techniques used in Greater Appalachia, the Midlands, or other nations. With minor exceptions this vast region couldn't be effectively colonized without the deployment of vast industrial resources: railroads, heavy mining equipment, ore smelters, dams, and irrigation systems (Woodard, American Nations, 12).

To achieve this colonization, the Far West became dependent upon larger corporations (usually based in east coast cities) or the federal government to manipulate and pioneer its environment to allow more opportunities. This creates a paradoxical context in which the Far West is dependent upon external forces, while remaining frustrated at external involvement of distant entities.

Since the Northwest (Washington and Oregon) is comprised of the Left Coast and Far West, each nation is inherently at odds with each other. Whereas the Left Coast favors ecological preservation and conservatism, the Far West is dependent upon ecological engagement and manipulation for its livelihood. The Left Coast seeks the individualism and self-expression, while the Far West maintains relationships with larger entities, corporations, and government. Each nation has different cultures, values, and economic dependencies. However, there is the same basic opportunity in both nations.

The Secular Northwest(s)

Despite the vast differences of values, culture, and affinity, there are similarities. Both nations are inherently secular. Following the national trends, the Northwest is one of the least religious areas of the country, and this truth is reflected in both nations. Both the Far West and the Left Coast exhibit the characteristics of post-Christendom, but in different expressions: it is a secularism that encompasses both urban and rural, left-leaning and right-leaning. The secularism found in the Northwest that exceeds the common understanding of what is secular. In this way, the nations of the Pacific Northwest are two expressions of the same challenges of our secular age.

Adopting the Model of Aidan: Gospel Community

To reach this new age, the church needs to follow the example and practices of the Celtic Church. Aidan was probably not as skilled in intellect or rhetoric as his predecessors, but he experienced more success than them in establishing a church community. In many ways this was because Aidan remained consistent in life and practice. The comprehensive message of the gospel needed to be expressed through a community animated by the gospel. His vision of church could be described as “God-shaped hub communities that have a heart for God, others, and society” (Simpson, *St Aidan's Way of Mission*, loc. 974).

Adopting the Posture of Aidan: Humility

Aidan was a model of humility; at no point did he express or convey that he or his message was superior to the natives. He served all; the monastery, the fields, and the royal court. He met others on the road with a selfless passion and deep interest. Ray Simpson says,

*With a few brothers, Aidan traversed both town and country on foot. The travelers turned aside to greet anyone they met, whether poor or rich, listening to them and becoming friends. If the people they met were believers, the brothers strengthened them in the faith and stirred them up, by words and actions, to the giving of alms and the performance of good works. They asked unbelievers if they would like to know why they had come, and told them gospel stories (Simpson, *St Aidan's Way of Mission*, loc. 189).*

Embodying Faithful Presence

One of the most helpful books of the last decade is James Hunter's *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. In this book Hunter describes the church's failed response over the twentieth century and the hope for it in the twenty-first century. The problem for the church in the twentieth century was either unreflective assimilation into the culture, as seen in many mainline churches, or fortress mentality from the culture, as seen in fundamentalist churches. Hunter's proposal is to use the metaphor of exile for understanding *where* and *how* the church lives in a culture. This proposal echoes Israel's experiences in exile, the early church's experience, the Celtic Church, and the modern-day church. While the church lives within these communities, they are often "not of" these communities. Instead, the church should both maintain its distinctive as a community called to a place, shaped by the gospel, and faithful to the way of Jesus in a difficult context.

Aidan's life was one of faithful presence. In humility, he sought to understand the world he was called to live and how to discern God's presence in that place. "For Aidan, place was important but it was not the be-all and end-all. What was all-important to him was to be in the right place at the right time" (Simpson, *St Aidan's Way of Mission*, loc. 396).

Missional Posture of Contextualization

Aidan embraced a missional posture in several revolutionary ways. First, Aidan revolutionized the idea of clergy by resisting the prominent place of clergy within Roman society, thereby using the role as an opportunity to identify with the poor, the marginalized, and the outcasts while remaining conversant with nobles. Monks never carried weapons, despite the highly

dangerous country. Monks also never used horses for transportation, despite being offered horses. The Celtic clergy would walk everywhere. This conviction established a posture of humility in the region as they viewed themselves as guests and pilgrims. Therefore, rather than being keen on addressing, preaching, and lecturing, they were first ardent listeners. Their calm demeanor would allow them to have many interactions and share the gospel.

This method of slow, deliberate mission work provided a strong foundation wherein the gospel was able to flourish because it connected with the community at a deeper level. They were cherished by the laymen and respected by the nobles while maintaining their distinction from either. In many ways, St. Aidan modeled the gospel in a profound way.

Missional Hospitality

Mission was not merely outward, but was receptive as well. Within the life of the Celtic church there is an emphasis on hospitality. The church understood that personal piety is not a higher practice than hospitality, but rather hospitality is the fullest expression of personal piety and missiology. Therefore, the Celtic monks would drop whatever task they were doing if there was an opportunity to host. As Ray Simpson notes, the Celtic Church understood that “Hospitality is not only a custom in a home, but a key into the Kingdom of God” (Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 113).

How this May Look in the Northwest

Aidan and St. Patrick were contextual and missional with their gospel message. They understood that in order to effectively communicate the gospel, it had to be an indigenous expression that both resonated with the culture, but also provided the fuller hope of the gospel to that culture. Within the Northwest, a deeply contextual, and missional, church plant will look different in the Far West from the Left Coast. The communities will reflect the same gospel principles, but expressed missional to their respective contexts differently.

Following Aidan’s example, the planter should prioritize the consistency needed for the expression of the church to reflect the message of the church. The gospel should not justify the means, but regulate them. This way, whatever model the planter chooses to utilize to plant, should be informed and governed by the gospel.

Gospel-Shaped Ekklesia: Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology

Reflecting this idea of the Celtic Church, Leslie Newbigin understood that the church’s ontology (who she is) informs her economy (what she does). For Newbigin the conviction to take the term ekklesia was indicative of both the comprehensive gospel she claimed and how she embodied that gospel. Michael Goheen articulates this understanding when reference the gospel-centered community which constitutes the *ekklesia*,

In the New Testament, ekklesia is accompanied by the words “of God.” The church is the public assembly of God. The one who calls out this public assembly is not the town clerk but God himself. In every place God calls forth his new humanity as a representative and public body to which he calls all people. The church is the firstfruit in each city of God’s assembled new humanity. Ekklesia is the church’s self-chosen name. By contrast, the enemies of the church employed other terms such as heranos and thiasos. These words interpreted the church not as the new humankind but as a private religious cult that offered personal and otherworldly salvation. These religious communities fit nicely in the private realm of life and did not challenge the public doctrine of the Roman Empire. The church refused to adopt this designation of a private religious fraternity. They saw themselves as the new humanity, called into the end-time kingdom by God and launched into the public life of the Roman Empire to challenge all competing allegiances. Since the salvation of the kingdom is as wide as the creation.

*This is what drove the church to adopt the title ekklesia and refuse any terms that gave it the identity of a private religious body. Newbigin’s conclusion is that, sadly, today in the West, “church” usually means something closer to heranos and thiasos than to ekklesia. The church has forgotten its eschatological existence as the new humankind called out by God and has accepted the designation of private religious body concerned for personal and otherworldly salvation. (Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology*, 61).*

Rather than settling for a detached, private, religious community, the church should be the embodiment of an eschatological reality that serves as a counter-cultural place of hope, as demonstrated in the Celtic Church.

Cultural Exegesis Exercises

There are many ways you can learn to understand your community. First, there are studies that detail the demographics of a given county or city. Refer to these are sites for this information:

<https://www.cdxtech.com/tools/demographicdata/>

<https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/demographic-statistics-by-zip-code-acfc9>

<https://www.batchgeo.com/>

Second, get to know the narrative of your community by engaging in your community. Meet with anyone and everyone who will meet with you. This could include people at coffee shops, breweries, city officials, police officers, and school administrators. It is kind to present a gift as

a “thank you” for their time (this can be as simple a gift card to a local coffee shop). Ask them questions about their understanding of the city. Examples include:

- When did you move to the city?
- What do you like about the city?
- What are some frustrations you have about the city?
- Are there areas or needs that a church could uniquely address?

Once you have conducted these interviews, you can recognize the culture of the community: its values and idols. Understanding the culture will provide an opportunity to contextualize the gospel to the broader community. Through this simple exercise you will practice the active listening used by the Celtic Church and develops a humbler posture towards the community.

Encouragement

We need planters like St. Aidan; planters who humbly and genuinely live the realities of the gospel, both in community and practice. Aidan demonstrated that greatness does not always involve extraordinary giftings, but a great faith. By cultivating communities that are shaped by the gospel, embody the gospel, and extend the gospel, we can be a faithful presence.

Additional Resources

Community, Mission, Hospitality

To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World by James Hunter

Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission by David E. Fitch

Seven Practices for the Church on Mission by David E. Fitch (an abbreviated version of “Faithful Presence)

Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life by Jeff Vanderstelt and Jackie Hill Perry

Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today's Church Paperback by Ian Bradley

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl

Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter

St. Aidan

St Aidan's Way of Mission: Celtic Insights for a Post-Christian World by Ray Simpson

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne by David Adam





Rhythms and Practices for Resilient Ministry



Cave. Refractory. Road.

Within these contexts, the Celtic Church embraced rhythms and practices that lead to sustainable ministry and longevity. Each context was a place to connect with God, with one another, and with the world. There was no distinction between having a faith that is theological, pietistic, or missional. The Celtic understanding of faith was inherently all three. It led to a holistic, fully-integrated faith.

Each setting serves as a metaphor for life. Within each context there are accompanying spiritual disciplines, which are necessary for sustainable ministry in the twenty-first century. By embracing the paradigm of cave, refractory, and road, the worshipper can embody a more holistic posture towards spiritual growth, developing ministerially, and living missionally.

The cave has an upward orientation, wherein the worshipper retreats to spend time in communion with God. The refectory is a place of both fellowship and hospitality. This reflects not only life with God, but also life with one another. Finally, the road was a context of pilgrimage and mission, an understanding that one can live faithfully in the journey that God calls us to. This includes vocation and spiritual pilgrimage (the Celtic practice of *peregrinatio*) that constitute life. Understanding these contexts for upward, outward, and inward growth is an empowering image of the journey we are all on.

Following the example of the Celtic Church, spiritual practices aren't just asceticism or escape, but the fuel that animates a relationship with God, passionate ministry, and long-term sustainability. In understanding the challenges of ministry, it is worth reconsidering the practices of the Celtic Church.

Alarming Statistics

Ministry is very difficult. Here are the statistic concerning pastors and burnout:

- 1,500 pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.
- 80% of pastors and 84% of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors.
- 50% are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- 70% said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons.
- Almost 40% polled said they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning their ministry.
- 80% of seminary and "Bible" school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.
- 90% of pastors said their seminary or "Bible" school training did only a fair to poor job preparing them for ministry.
- Pastors are 35% more likely to be terminated if they work less than 50 hours weekly.
- 80% of pastors believe their ministry negatively affects their families.
- 80% of pastors say they do not have sufficient time to spend with their spouse.
- 55% of pastors receive support and accountability from a small group.
- 45.5% of pastors have experienced burnout/depression and had to take a break from ministry.
- 57% of pastors do not have a regularly scheduled and implemented exercise routine.

(Hollaran, *Christian Ministry Burnout: Prevention, Signs, Statistics, and Recovery*, <https://www.leadershipresources.org/blog/christian-ministry-burnout-prevention-signs-statistics-recovery/>)

These statistics, in conjunction with the challenges of our new missionary age may increase the fruitless, alone, and isolated feeling in ministers. In order to navigate this age of post-modernity and secularism, planters and ministers need to develop sustainable practices that will ensure long-term resilient ministry.

The Most Important Ingredient for Fruitful Ministry

Within *City Shaped Churches*, Linda Bergquist and Michael Crane describe determination as the most important ingredient for fruitful ministry. They state,

Research on church planters in Belgium discovered determination made the difference in seeing churches started: Determination was the crucial factor: regardless of training, theology, or the population density of the target region, those church planters who persevered in their mission for a decade or more succeeded in establishing a viable church (Bergquist and Crane. loc. 1075).

While theological prowess, cultural exegesis, and creative ministry are important, they are secondary to the life of the planter. The Celtic Church cultivated a determined ministry through the ordinary spiritual disciplines and practices.

The Themes for Resilient Ministry and Renewal

The book *Resilient Ministry* lists five different themes that contribute to long term success and resiliency within ministry. These five themes are: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family life, and leadership and management practices (Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, 16). Similarly, Rebecca Lyon's book *Rhythms of Renewal* lists similar themes within four quadrants of renewal: input rhythms (rest and restore) and output rhythms (connect and create). There is much overlap between these two works, so they will be considered together. While the church is rediscovering these practices and recognizing their importance for ministry and life, each one of these themes was intrinsic within the Celtic Church and contributed to its faithful, fruitful, and successful ministry.

Rest I Spiritual Formation

Michael Mitton provides the clearest example of how spiritual practices informed the missiology of the Celtic Church. Mitton notes,

*The Celtic church knew that prayer and devotion to God had to be at the heart of its life if it was to effectively witness to God. The hermit was to some degree living out fully what most Christians could live out only partially. It was essential that some of the community lived out this life for the sake of the community, and indeed for the sake of the wider community. The hermit provided a kind of anchor for a church which could easily have become over-busy, and which was no doubt tempted by materialism in much the same ways that the church is today (Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord*, 125).*

In order to live with such devotion, the Celts embraced the practices of spiritual formation, especially silence and solitude. “The Celts were inspired by the lives of the Egyptian desert fathers and mothers, and learned, through their examples, the spiritual disciplines of withdrawal, of solitude and silence- that trained them to re-engage their community more effectively” (Blazer, *Thin Places*, 110). These periods of withdrawal for silence and solitude were practiced by embracing the creational rhythms of work and rest found in the practice of sabbath. The Celtic church practiced the rhythms of silence and solitude each day, week, and year.

Is silence and solitude possible in our age? It is not only possible, but vital for health. Cal Newman’s, *Digital Minimalism*, presents sobering facts concerning our technological age. If you guessed the world’s most valuable resource, you would probably assume it was oil. However, this is not the case. The advent of the internet and smart phone has given rise to the “attention economy.” The average smart phone user touches their phone approximately 2,617 times a day. With habitual practices like these, attention is more valuable than oil. Google is valued at \$800 billion, Facebook at \$500 billion and ExxonMobile at \$370 billion. We live in an age that monetizes our attention, and the only cure is silencing the digital noise through these historic Christian practices of silence, solitude, and sabbath.

Restore | Self-Care

In contrast with the Greco-Roman world, which viewed creation as “defiled”, or eastern cultures, which viewed creation as an “illusion,” the Celts embraced and celebrated nature. This was inherent in the Druid worldview and it established common ground with biblical Christianity. The Celts practiced physical stewardship and caring for the body. They also valued being in nature. To honor both physical health and nature, they learned to walk place to place as a primary means of transportation and gospel work.

The Celts revered nature. Timothy Joyce describes the creational appreciation of the pre-Christian Celts.

Sacred groves, rather than any building, were the places for worship and sacrifice. The oak tree in particular, in its stature and strength, was the sign of the divine and its setting the site for religious ceremonies... the mystical bent of the Celt was especially evident in the great love of creation and all of nature... This love of nature is central to Celtic Christianity as is the source of a wonderful heritage of natural poetry (Joyce, Celtic Christianity, 17).

The Celts embraced the idea of “thin places”, places “where the line between the spirit world and the physical world was ‘tissue-paper thin’” (Blazer, *Thin Places*, 26). However, the Celtic Church embraced these ideas by redeeming them (following the example of St. Paul in Acts 17 and St. Patrick to Ireland). Rather than identifying these places of Celtic mysticism or pagan spirituality, Tracy Blazer notes, “These holy places now became recognized as sacred

sites where the Holy Spirit of God seemed as near as one's breath" (Blazer, *Thin Places*, 29). Similarly, there is a spiritual sensitivity of people in the Northwest; many appreciate forests, mountains, lakes and rivers as modern-day sacred sites. There is a creational and natural power and presence, likewise, it is healthy and life-giving to experience these places as restorative to the planter's and minister's soul.

While walking was an expression of their humility and relational hospitality, the Celtic church's decision to walk rather than use horses as transportation may have been a primary contributor to their longevity and sustainability. Rebekah Lyons notes,

The average person now spends 9.3 hours sitting per day—far more than the 7.7 hours we spend sleeping. This inactivity is creating a set of cascading issues that can undermine our other attempts to get out of our funks. Not only does the lack of exercise make us more susceptible to heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and other ailments that come from a lethargic lifestyle, but it's shutting down our brains and limiting our growth (Lyons, *Rhythms of Renewal*, 121).

The benefits of walking are now embraced by large corporations, such as Google, who provides walking breaks and walking meetings for the employees. Scientifically, walking is shown to increase creativity and productivity and to improve mental health (Opezza and Schwartz, *Give Your Ideas Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking*, 1147). By walking, the Celtic Church was exercising (pun not intended) a rhythm of physical self-care. Likewise, most ministers live a sedentary lifestyle and more frequent walks may help in a holistic way, improving physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

Create

Just as self-care increases creativity, many ministers need to practice creativity. The Celtic community had an archaic caste system, wherein different positions and vocations indicated different social status. Surprisingly, artists were close to the top of the status. There were six basic social classes within Celtic society.

*The lowest social grading were the 'non-freeman.' The Celts were opposed to slavery, so there people were not slaves as much as law-breakers. In the next group were the people who owned no land and hired themselves for labour. The third group was made up of those who owned land and worked it. The fourth group wee the people sometimes described as 'Celtic Nobility'... the fifth group was the professional class, and in the grouping came Druids, lawyers, doctors and, most significantly, the bards (Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord*, 148).*

Culture and arts were important in the Celtic tradition and these values were reflected in the church. Bede records the amazing story of Caedmon, who discovered his musical talents later

in life and dedicated the rest of his life to composing worship songs. If you resonate with creativity or the arts, you must cultivate an outlet for creativity.

Connect I Marriage and Family (Celtic Idea of *Anamchara*)

The themes of marriage and family may be strange to consider since the monks and ministers of the Celtic Church were celibate and single, without a nuclear family. However, this does not mean they lacked deep, sacrificial relationships or relational depth found within families or marriages. They experienced these relational communities through monasteries for men and abbeys for women. Within these contexts, the Celtic church was able to cultivate the same depth and vulnerability within most marriages through the idea of an *anamchara*.

Brene Brown has popularized the idea and value of vulnerability. Vulnerability is both a place and posture of growth and courage and is needed in all relationships and churches. Brown states, “Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path” (Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 34).

In order to form a community reflective of the gospel, the Celtic Church embraced relationships of vulnerability through the idea of *anamchara*. An *anamchara*, is a Celtic word meaning “soul-friend”. The two main components of an *anamchara* is *sanctuary*, wherein it is a safe and hospitable environment, and *confession*. Tracy Blazer notes, “the goal of this soul-friend was not to be the cure (or Christ for the person), but rather to “apply the appropriate cure to the soul’s disease” (Blazer, *Thin Places*, 53). The *anamchara* is the deepest expression of the refractory: outward living to another person and known by that person. For the minister, they must seek to cultivate strong relationships that reflect the vulnerability of *anamchara*. If single, they can experience and cultivate these deep relationships through community. If married, it provides a new paradigm for the relationship. In an age where the term “soul-mates” is thrown around loosely, *anamchara*, or “soul friends”, can help the minister develop a strong source of community.

Connect I Leadership and Management

The Celtic Church developed its own system of raising leaders and overseeing monks. This occurred through the establishment of schools, monasteries, and abbeys. The systems they established were both reflective of the larger church and shaped by Celtic distinctives. For example, one of the unique features of Celts was its value in egalitarianism. The Druids established positions for women to be in spiritual authority and queens of tribes served as political authorities. Women were given many of the same rights afforded to men. This Celtic culture demonstrated a different understanding than the Greco-Roman cultures with regards to gender and sexuality. Similarly, the Celtic Church expressed a more complex view of sin,

gender, and sexuality while staying biblically and historically orthodox (c.f. Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 124).

The Celtic Church developed a strong system of leadership by creating new, non-ordained, positions for women to lead and serve alongside men. Within the establishments of Abbeys, women could exercise unique giftings, callings, and leadership. For example, when a war claimed the life of a tribal chieftain, usually the church would provide the widow sanctuary. These noblewomen would often be able to serve in ministering and caring for local communities.

Additional Resources

Resources for Celtic Spirituality

Celtic Daily Office by the Northumbria Community

The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination by Esther De Waal

Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition by Esther de Waal

Celtic Christianity: A Sacred Tradition, a Vision of Hope by Timothy J Joyce

Resources for Soul Care

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature by Peter Scazzero

The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World
by Peter Scazzero

Rhythms of Renewal: Trading Stress and Anxiety for a Life of Peace and Purpose by
Rebekah Lyons

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World by John Mark Comer

Feedback

We'd love to hear from you! Could you please take 3 minutes and complete a quick survey about the content in this manual? This will allow the manual to continue to develop. Please use the link (or QR code on your phone) and complete this anonymous survey.



<https://forms.gle/bu8JXQPFgRqLnNMGA>



APPENDIX B: EVALUATIONS

Training Manual Evaluation



QR Code:

Link: <https://forms.gle/bu8JXQPFgRqLnNMGA>

Training Evaluation



QR Code:

Link: <https://forms.gle/ef87qsQ2cAnDYYWp8>

Training Manual Evaluation:

2/25/2020

Conversing with the Celts Booklet Evaluation

Conversing with the Celts Booklet Evaluation

How long ago did you read the manual?

- ☐ Just finished
- ☐ 6 months ago
- ☐ 1 year ago

The ideas in the manual proved helpful for my ministry

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly Disagree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly Agree |

The ideas in the manual were applicable to my geographical context

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly Disagree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly Agree |

The ideas in the manual changed my (or our) ministry paradigm

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly Disagree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly Agree |

What topics were most helpful for you?

Your answer

Are there topics that could be more expanded to be more helpful?

Your answer

Would you like to continue to be in conversation about how the Celtic Church could inform your ministry?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Contact Info

Your answer

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Training Evaluation:

2/17/2020

Conversing with Celts Evaluation

Conversing with Celts Evaluation

Date of the Training

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

This course has improved my confidence as a Planter, Pastor, or leader

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree

I learned ideas and concepts that I will be able to apply to my context

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strong Agree

The training was relevant to me and my context (either location or ministry)

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

What material was most helpful for you?

Your answer

Are there topics that could be more expanded to be more helpful?

Your answer

Do you have any suggestions for improving the course as a whole?

Your answer

The facilitator was confident and prepared

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The materials were presented in a way to facilitate learning and conversation

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

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